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Arakan and Bengal : the rise and decline of the Mrauk U kingdom (Burma) from the fifteenth to the seventeeth century AD

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CHAPTER EIGHT

TRADE AND TAXATION

In describing the rise and decline of the Mrauk U kingdom one of the central themes of the previous Chapters has been the Ninety Years' War (c. 1574-1666) between the Arakanese and the Mughals over south-eastern Bengal. In this Chapter some aspects of the economic history of the Arakan-Bengal continuum will be reviewed that help us to understand the underlying dynamics of the expansion and the subsequent fragmentation of the Arakanese kingdom. It will be argued that the control over south-eastern Bengal, the economic centre of Bengal from the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century, was the cork on which the Arakanese kingdom thrived. A comparison will be made of the effects of incomes from trade and tax revenues from Bengal on the rise and decline of the Mrauk U kingdom.

From an Arakanese perspective it has until now been assumed that revenues from trade were essential for the rise to power of the Arakanese kings. Maurice Collis, San Shwe Bu, D.G.E. Hall, Michael Charney and Jacques Leider all have suggested that trade provided the Arakanese kings with revenues that enabled them to first expand and later consolidate their hold over other local centres in the Arakanese littoral and which were also an important instrument in the expansion of the Arakanese kingdom.[1] These assumptions have been based on a more or less superficial understanding of the mechanisms of Arakanese trade and taxation. In fact when viewed in terms of the commerce in the Bay of Bengal as a whole Arakanese trade always was a rather limited affair. To be able to assess the importance of revenues from trade vis-à-vis land revenues form Bengal the following paragraphs provide a more detailed analysis of the development of trade and taxation in Arakan during the seventeenth century.

In the first Chapter the economic geography of Chittagong and Mrauk U has been analyzed and both cities have been compared. The conclusion of this comparison between Mrauk U and Chittagong was that, while in a local Arakanese perspective Mrauk U certainly had specific advantages over other local centres, but in a regional context the port of Chittagong was far more successful in attracting long-distance trade and was of strategic importance for anyone wishing to control south-eastern Bengal. The possession of Chittagong and its

[1] Charney, 'Rise of a mainland trading state', pp. 1-4; Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 417-418; Maurice Collis and San Shwe Bu, 'Arakan's place in the civilization of the Bay: a study of coinage and foreign relations', *Journal of the Burma Research Society* 15.1 (1925), pp.. 34-51; Hall, 'Studies in Dutch relations', pp. 1-31.

revenues was in this respect extremely important for the Mrauk U kings if they wanted to keep their advantage in the redistributive networks that formed the Arakanese state. Revenues from south-eastern Bengal flowed directly into the hands of the Mrauk U rulers enabling them to sustain large armies and to build strong alliances.

8.1 Trade in the Arakan-Bengal continuum

The central role of Chittagong in Bay of Bengal trade was illustrated when in 1608 the VOC sent a trading mission to Arakan to discover the trade of Bengal. The Arakanese king Man Raja-kri offered the harbour of Dianga near Chittagong to the VOC. Man Raja-kri suggested the company should make a fortress at Dianga for the protection of merchants. In 1616 after the Arakanese king Man Khamaung had removed Sebastião Gonçalves Tibao from Sandwip he told the Dutch company how during the early years of the seventeenth century Manuel de Mattos had succeeded in generating a tax revenue at Dianga of 20,000 Tanka.[2] The Arakanese kings thus hoped to employ Dutch naval strength to protect trade in the Arakan-Bengal continuum and to enhance their own income from tax. Arakanese promises of a profitable trade in this part of the Bay of Bengal prompted several investigations by the Dutch company into the nature of trade in the Bay of Bengal. Two special reports concerning this trade were eventually produced, one written in 1608, the other in 1614.[3] Both reports provide an overview of the trade in this part of the Indian Ocean during the early seventeenth century. It is interesting to note what Cortenhoeff, the author of the 1614 report had to say about trade in eastern Bengal:

> The city of Chattigam [Chittagong], where this king [Man Raja-kri] has a fortress, lies at about 22 degrees north. [Chittagong] is situated next to Diango [Dianga] Bouduschreeve [not identified]. The cities Saxsala [not identified], Romour [Ramu] and Sijckeraij [Cukkara on the Matamuhuri river]. All these places are situated east of the river Ganges along the coast in the direction of Arakan. Bolwa [Bhalua] lies west of Chittagong. People say that the king of Arakan has again recovered this place from Achabar [Akbar sic.].
>
> Dianga is separated by a small river from the mainland and the government of

[2] NA VOC 1061, Letter from Cortenhoeff to the chamber Amsterdam, dated Masulipatnam 25 April 1616, fol. 192r.

[3] NA VOC 1055 n.f. Report on the Bay of Bengal and Arakan by Pieter Willemsz., dated Masulipatnam 25 May 1608 printed as Pieter Willemsz, 'Informatie van de Bochte van Bengala en de Arracan gedaen door Pieter Willemss. in Masulipatnam desen 25 Maij Anno 1608', J.K.J. de Jonge, *De Opkomst van het Nederlandsch Gezag in Oost-Indië* (1595-1610) 16 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1862-1909), pp. 3:287-291. and NA VOC 1059 Cortenhoeff, Short note on Diango and other places in Bengal, n.d. [1614], fol. 107.

> Saxsala. It has been praised and offered to us as a perfect place for conducting trade in Bengal. The Mogolleessen from the land of Achabar [Mughals from the land of Akbar] also come to Dianga to trade. Dianga is situated within sight of Chittagong and in a straight line would be two hours sailing from Chittagong, the journey however takes three-quarters of day via the river and the sea across the broken land of the delta. […] From Arakan ships with a draft of two or three fathom can sail to Dianga in three days. […]
>
> Goods to be had at Dianga
> Catsecilles, Cassis, t'Chantaers, Bethielles Gramsont and a lot of other types of cloth from Bengal[4], silk cloth and the like, red lacquer, long white pepper, wax, sugar, rosewater, grains, arak, rice, butter, oil and an innumerable amount of other provisions. Indigo is plentiful, and of a better quality than that of Arakan. It is hoped that the indigo of Agra will be brought to market at Dianga after news will have reached the Mughals that the VOC has opened a factory there.
>
> Goods to be shipped to Dianga
> Gold, rubies and lesser precious stones, like roughly cut emeralds are brought by the local Portuguese. Reals of Eight, tin, steel, red and other nicely coloured cloth, all kinds of porcelain, spices and sandalwood. The shells named cowries brought from the green Maldives and Ceylon are current as payment and give a good profit. Tintenago, wanted by the Mughals in Bengal and traded to India.

The 1608 report by Willemsz is similar while adding that most of the finer cloth is produced in Sripur and Sonargaon and that those are also brought to markets in the Chittagong area. The Sripur area was in fact the economic heart of Bengal. It is striking that early in the seventeenth century the VOC identified Chittagong as the port which they wanted to use as a base for trading with Bengal and places as far into the interior of India such as Agra and Lahore. Surprising as this may seem, accustomed as historians are today to the success of European trading companies operating from their factories on the river Hugli in the eighteenth century, it is certainly an anachronism to identify the Hugli as the centre of the Bengal economy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[5] The superiority of south-eastern Bengal ports over those situated on the Hugli is clearly expressed by Johan van Leenen in his report of the survey of the Bay of Bengal from the Kaladan to the Brahmaputra in 1666. Van

[4] See Dijk, 'Seventeenth century Burma' vol. 2 appendix 6 for an excellent overview of various types of cloth produced and traded in the Bay of Bengal in the seventeenth century.
[5] The Hugli was of course the best place to access the Bihar market for saltpetre and opium.

Leenen concluded that Dhaka and Chittagong were far better situated to exploit the commerce of Bengal than the ports on the river Hugli. He observed that Dhaka possessed much better inland connections than the ports on the western branches of the Ganges and was also much easier reached from the Bay of Bengal from a port such as Chittagong.[6] The only reason in fact that forced the European trading companies, and of course indigenous merchants as well, to settle at the Hugli was the incessant warfare between Arakan and the Mughals over south-eastern Bengal, a war that was fought to control the economic centre of sixteenth and seventeenth century Bengal. The settlement of the European companies on the Hugli was thus a necessity and not because this was from the very beginning near the economic centre of Bengal. The Ninety Years' war between Arakan and Bengal prohibited those traders from settling at the most convenient spot, Chittagong.

In the following paragraphs Arakanese trade will be analyzed with a view to compare possible revenues from trade with the income derived from Bengal. It will be argued that Arakan itself only permitted a small scale trade, augmented by the slave trade, but put crudely this was just another kind of revenue from Bengal. The rice trade was the central pillar of the Arakanese economy and will be discussed first. The extremely low price of rice in Arakan should, apart from the favourable climate, also be attributed to the use of slave labour.

8.2 The development of the Arakanese trade during the 17th century

Tomé Pires noted in 1515 that Arakan had a good harbour visited by Kling merchants from the South of India, Bengalis and Mon, but that its trade was rather insignificant.[7] It should be assumed that Muslim merchants from India had visited Arakan since the fourteenth century. From the reign of king Man Raja in 1518 Arakanese kings are seen to actively promote commerce. Man Raja in 1518 sent a letter to the king of Portugal inviting Portuguese traders

[6] NA VOC 1264, fol. 328-336 Report of Johan van Leenen, commander of the ships *Landsmeer* and *Purmerland* in aid of the king of Hindostan in his war against Arakan, darted Batavia 2 July 1667., fol. 332v. '*Langs dit gewenste vaerwater, dan Edele heeren, connen de goederen en coopmanz. van de Comp. seer bequaemel. naer Decaa en Ouglyse Ganges af en aan gevoert werden, ende verseeckeren wy Ueds dat sulckx niet alleen vry voorspoediger, maer oock met minder moeyte en gevaer als langs den wegh der sout barcken steets sal connen geschieden ende om weclke redenen benevens alle de vooraangehaelde ick oordeelen moet, niet als seer wel te hebben gedaen, dat den wech van Decaa naer Ougly door see ben gevaeren, ende alsoo sal nu volgens ueds goed concept begrepen in voorgemelt. haer eds papieren het middel syn uytgevonden om niet allen den Tessindiansen zuycker, die met weinigh oncosten een wech van 2 a 3 dagen voor stroom to Decca int laetste van september can gebracht werden, te bevryden, van soo veel molesten pericul en swaere ongelden als men jaerlykcx int afbrenghen van deselve naer Ougly siet geschieden, maer oock behalven dat wy hebben doen sien hoe de vaert van Arracan op Setigam met groot ende cleyn vaertuyg soo wel is te gebruicken, soo sal de negotie tot Decca connen vry syn behalven van de moeilyckheden die dese onderworpen is, noch van soo veele oncosten die nu met t af en aanbrengen vande goederen op de binnenwateren moeten gedaen werden.*'

[7] A. Cortesão, *A Suma Oriental de Tomé Pires e o livro de Francisco Rodrigues* (Coimbra, 1978), pp. 228, n. 176 quoted in Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 419.

to Arakan and offering them security.[8] It is however only from the reign of king Man Pa in the middle of the sixteenth century that Arakanese chronicles mention the arrival of large numbers of merchants in Arakan. Man Pa is credited with the creation of a class of guards for the protection of foreign traders and digging tanks with fresh water for the use of these merchants.[9] With arrival of groups of Portuguese merchants in the Bay of Bengal in the second half of the sixteenth century more information on Arakanese trade becomes available. The introduction of the *carreiras* system by the *Estado da Índia* in 1518 permitted one annual voyage to Chittagong. Four out of sixteen *carreira* voyages allowed by Martim Afonso de Sousa (1542-1545) were destined for Bengal. According to Subrahmanyam those voyages all headed for Chittagong.[10]

Arakanese trade can be said to have extended southwards from the Maldives, to the Coromandel coast and Bengal, northwards across the Arakan Yoma to Burma and eastwards to Melaka and Aceh.[11] In the Maldives rice was exchanged for cowries, shells used as currency in Arakan. Trade with the ports on the Coromandel coast focussed on the exchange of rice and elephants for high quality cloth, red yarn, iron, steel, tobacco, and a small number of other goods. Bengal was a partner for trading foodstuffs and silver which where exchanged for saltpetre, opium, high quality cloth, salt and butter. Burma was a trading partner from where rubies and other precious stones where obtained in exchange for rice and re-exported cloth. Trade with Tenasserim, Melaka and Aceh consisted of rice exports for which in exchange sulphur, pepper, lead, tin, and Chinaware was procured. Arakan's trade clearly reflected the fact that the basis of the Arakanese economy always was rice cultivation.[12] Trade with Coromandel and the VOC exceeded the other commercial contacts by far. Cowries were only imported when there were shortages and commercial contacts with Melaka and Aceh were also sporadic. Trade with Bengal mainly concentrated itself in Chittagong and as a consequence of the Ninety Years' war with the Mughals Bengal exports were diverted to ports on the Hugli.

From the first decades of the seventeenth century the VOC encountered fierce competition from Muslim merchants from Coromandel in Arakan. During the whole seventeenth century traders from Coromandel would be the only noticeable group of foreign merchants in Mrauk U apart from the VOC and private Portuguese and Dutch traders. The competition of the

[8] Bouchon, *Voyage*, pp. 362-363.
[9] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 429.
[10] Leider quoting Subrahmanyam in Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 420.
[11] NA VOC 1062, fol. 37-38 Letter from Samuel Kindt to the chamber Amsterdam, dated Masulipatnam, 12 June 1615.
[12] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 417.

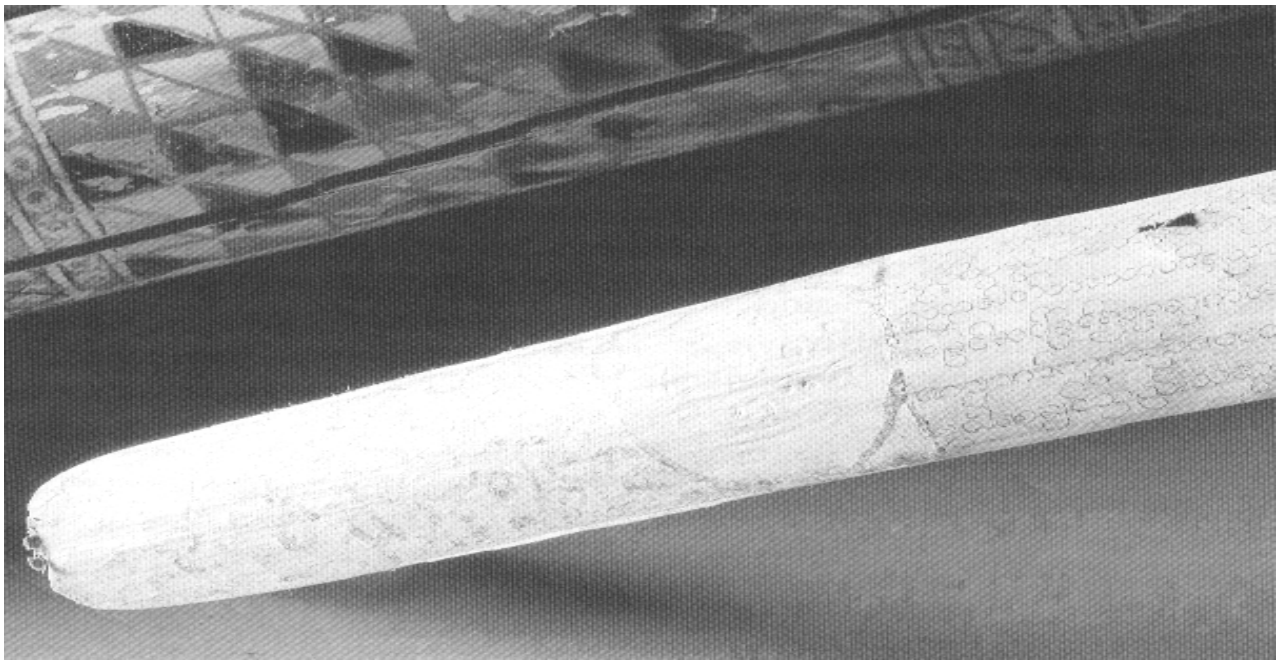
Coromandel merchants forced the VOC to abandon the idea of importing high quality cloth from Coromandel in Arakan.[13] The huge profits of the elephant trade enabled the Coromandel merchants to sell, if needed, their goods at considerable losses in Arakan.[14] The idea to use the Coromandel trade to buy rice and slaves only surfaced again briefly in the 1660s, and was not put into operation because of the departure of the VOC from Arakan in 1665. The trade between Coromandel and Arakan remained firmly in the hands of Indian merchants throughout the seventeenth century. Haji Baba, Achyutappa Chetti and Chinnana Chetti are the most prominent examples of such merchants.[15] The decline of commerce between the two regions at the end of the seventeenth century was not caused by competition from VOC or other European trading companies, but was the result of the gradual collapse of the Arakanese state after the loss of control over Chittagong from the mid 1640s, which severely undermined Arakanese spending power. It was therefore the growth and expansion of the Mughal empire that primarily influenced the slow decline of trade between Arakan and Coromandel.

Although Arakanese kings from the early sixteenth century actively fostered trade to enhance their own incomes, Sirisudhammaraja is the first Arakanese king known to have operated as a merchant himself. To the marked surprise of the Dutch this king started sending his own ships to Coromandel in 1628.[16] Almost a decade later also the chief queen of Sirisudhammaraja, Nat Shin May, is reported to have sent her own ships to Coromandel.[17] The trade of the king mainly centred on the sale of elephants to Coromandel. It seems the king received elephants as a form of taxation in kind or tribute from tribes living in the hills and sold them either via his own agents in Coromandel or to foreign merchants in Arakan who would export them to Coromandel.[18] The elephant trade would be one of the mainstays of the Arakan-Coromandel trade during the seventeenth century. Elephants would sell against high prices in Coromandel,

[13] NA VOC 1084, fol. 166-168 Letter from Marten IJsbrantsz to the chamber Amsterdam, dated Pulicat 28 April 1625., fol. 167r.
[14] NA VOC 1134, fol. 183-189 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 20 December 1640.
[15] Haji Baba operated from Arakan at least from 1608 to 1623. NA VOC 1055 Letters and papers from Atjeh n.f. nr. 1 Letter from Jan Gerritsz Ruyll on board the ship of Moluque Tujar to the next VOC representative arriving in Arakan, dated Arakan 27 March 1608; NA VOC 1065, fol. 114-115 Letter from Andreas Crieck to Coromandel, dated Arakan 12 February 1615; NA VOC 1083, fol. 188-190 Letter from Hendrik Lambrechts to Coromandel, dated Arakan 5 December 1623.
[16] Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp. 7:1350-1352 Letter from Marten IJsbrantsz to Coen, dated Pulicat 30 July 1628. Subrahmanyam, *The political economy of commerce. Southern India 1500-1650* (Cambridge, 1990) p. 307.
[17] NA VOC 1125, fol. 477-485 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan 10 January 1637. NA VOC 1126, fol. 291-297 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated November 1638.
[18] Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp 7:1435-1438 Letter from Marten IJsbrantsz to Coen, dated Masulipatnam 24 September 1628. *Dagh-register* 1641-1642, p. 145 entry for 1 May 1642 containing a letter from Lunnenburgh to Batavia, dated Arakan 2 March 1642.

giving profits of between 100 to 500%.[19] An animal bought in Arakan for 1,300 or 1,400 Tanka would in Coromandel fetch the same amount in Pagodas, i.e. five times as much.[20] Arakanese ships could carry as many as 14 animals at a time.[21] From the start it seems that Sirisudhammaraja used Achyutappa Chetti as his agent in Masulipatnam.[22] Achyutappa Chetti was the chief broker of the VOC in Coromandel and he and his brother Chinanna Chetti would become the most important merchants operating on the Coromandel-Arakan trade.[23] Chinanna Chetti had his own agent, a certain Vinqetadre Chetti, in Arakan.[24] In 1641 Chinanna Chetti in company with the Arakanese king Narapati-kri shipped as many as 14 elephants to Coromandel. This was an exceptional shipment; usually not more than 6 animals would be shipped each season.[25] Throughout the seventeenth century not more than between one to three voyages would be made between Arakan and Coromandel each year.[26]

[19] NA VOC 1134, fol. 183-189 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 20 December 1640.
[20] The Tanka valued at 24 stivers and the Pagoda at 120 stivers. Pagoda value from Dijk, *Seventeenth century Burma* 2.135.
[21] NA VOC 1159, fol. 369-383 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 31 October 1645; *Dagh-register* 1640-1641, pp. 166-170 entry for 24 January 1641. *Dagh-register* 1640-1641322.
[22] NA VOC 1098, fol. 494 Letter from Sirisudhammaraja to Marten IJsbrantsz in Pulicat, dated Arakan 19 April 1629.
[23] Subrahmanyam, *Political economy of commerce*, pp. 62, 300-314.
[24] NA VOC 1126, fol. 291-297 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan November 1638; NA VOC 1134, fol. 183-189 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 20 December 1640. NA VOC 1151, fol. 622-634 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 30 October 1643 631.
[25] *Dagh-register* 1640-1641, pp. 166-170 entry for 24 January 1641. *Dagh-register* 1640-1641 322, 419. Diary of Van den Helm 1645 entry for 11 March.
[26] Based on calculations from the VOC's Arakan papers and Subrahmanyam, *Political economy of commerce*, pp. 214, 311.



Written reminders of seventeenth century trade between Arakan and the Coromandel coast: Top: a letter from king Candasudhammaraja to the Armenian merchant Jeorge Christiano in Chennai in Persian with its original envelope and seal in Arakanese, dated 20 September 1679. The seal reads: *raja dhippati rhwe nan sa khan*, or 'Supreme Lord, Master of the Golden Palace'. Bottom, letter from king Candavijayaraja to the same merchant, this time in Arakanese dated 21 February 1718. Top: cloth jacket with seal of Candasudhammaraja, bottom: palm leaf letter in Arakanese with bamboo casket.

The goods brought from across the Bay of Bengal were bought in Arakan by petty traders. In Arakan the VOC had to sell its goods in small quantities. Adam van der Mandere remarked that due to the absence of large merchants he had to sell goods in small portions of between 4 and 10 Tanka. Van der Mandere observed that there were no merchants with more than 200 Tanka in cash in Arakan. He advised Batavia to bring to Arakan only silver, preferably in the form of *reals of eight*.[27]

8.3 Rice trade

The abundance of rice in Arakan was an important reason for the VOC to come to Arakan. In 1656 Batavia reminded its factors in Arakan that they had not received rice from Java in 6 to 12 months and expected Arakan to supply as much rice as could be obtained to 'feed this large body'. Over the years the unpredictable supply of rice to Batavia from Javanese fields would be the main factor behind the Dutch presence in Arakan.[28]

Paddy, or rice in the husk, was harvested usually from November onwards, and new rice was available on the market between December and February. As paddy has about twice the volume of rice, the VOC usually preferred rice to paddy.[29] Old rice, usually termed black or brown rice, was occasionally bought to produce arrack in Batavia.[30] Rice was procured by the VOC in a variety of ways. Rice could be bought from the royal granaries, or direct from farmers living in the Kaladan valley or around Chittagong. The king received a part of his income from taxation in kind. Rice was one of the agrarian products the king's subjects had to provide to the king as part of the Arakanese taxation system.[31] In January 1637 for example the king received 300 to 400 boats loaded with rice from Chittagong.[32] Unlike other products liable to taxation in kind such as cane and bamboo, the rice tax had a special function.[33] In

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[27] '*Alhier en connen geen waeren profitelyc aenden man gebrocht werden alsoo hier geen coopluyden syn die voor 200 Tangen contant connen coopen soo dat alhier geen beeter couranter waere en syn dan Realen van 8en. Eenige waeren vercoopende moeten de selven uitborgen ende met cleyne beetjes van 4,5 tot 7 en 10 tangen ontfangen met veel moyten dat een meserie is*'. NA VOC 1126, fol.291-297 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan November 1638, fol. 293.

[28] '*dat den rys hier doorgaens schaers omkomt, ende ons in groote quantiteyt van andere plaetsen dient te werden versorcht, om dit groote lichaem te spysighen ende niet verleegen te vallen*'. NA VOC 880, fol. 459-462 Letter from Batavia to Hendrik de Dieu, dated Batavia 22 July 1656, see also NA VOC 881, fol. 395-401 Letter from Batavia to Hendrik de Dieu, dated Batavia 20 August 1657; NA VOC 881, fol. 534-536 Letter from Batavia to Hendrik de Dieu, dated Batavia 30 October 1657.

[29] NA VOC 866, fol. 299-303 Letter from Batavia to Arent van der Helm, dated Batavia 31 May 1642.

[30] NA VOC 857, fol. 492-496 Letter from Batavia to Adam van der Mandere, dated Batavia 16 August 1635.

[31] See Leider, 'Taxation et groupes de service sous la royauté arakanaise. Un rapport d'enquête de 1803 dans un manuscrit birman de la Bibliothèque nationale de Paris', *Aséanie* 1 (1998), pp. 67-89. For a translation and introduction to the *cac kham khyak* [revenue inquest of Dhanyawati] of 1803 by Na On.

[32] These boats were named *Banrijs.* NA VOC 1125, fol. 477-485 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan 10 January 1637.

[33] Leider, 'Taxation', pp. 77-79.

times of famine the king would lend his subjects rice from the royal granaries.[34] Rice that was handed out in times of famine had however to be repaid the next year.[35] The rice stored in the royal granaries provided the tax paying population with a certain security in times of famine. It is also likely that the royal granaries were at the same time used as central provisions in times of war. The speed with which Arakanese armies could be raised and despatched presupposes the existence of large magazines which could quickly provide food for these military expeditions. The VOC only bought rice from the king when they were unable to buy on the market. This was for example often the case when they did not have a permanent factory in Arakan and arrived long after or before the rice harvest.[36]

The king or members of his Privy Council attempted to create a monopoly on rice exports twice. One attempt was made in the late 1630s by the *lashkar-wazir* of Sirisudhammaraja, the other by the treasurer of Candasudhammaraja at the end of the 1650s. Both monopolies only survived a few years and were abolished after the (violent) deaths of the monopolists involved.[37] As these monopolies were farmed out by the king at a set price they could provide the king with a predictable source of income. The fact that the attempts at monopoly were only twice successful for a very short period of time also shows the lack of royal support for these monopolies. It is in fact striking that apart from the brief involvement in trade of Sirisudhammaraja and his queen Nat Shin May the Arakanese nobility seems not to have been very active in trade. The absence of larger brokers in the market is also striking. The Arakanese nobility and the king seem to have been more oriented towards agriculture and land revenue collection. This could well explain why they were much more involved in the other important sector of the Mrauk U economy, the slave trade which will be discussed further on in this Chapter.

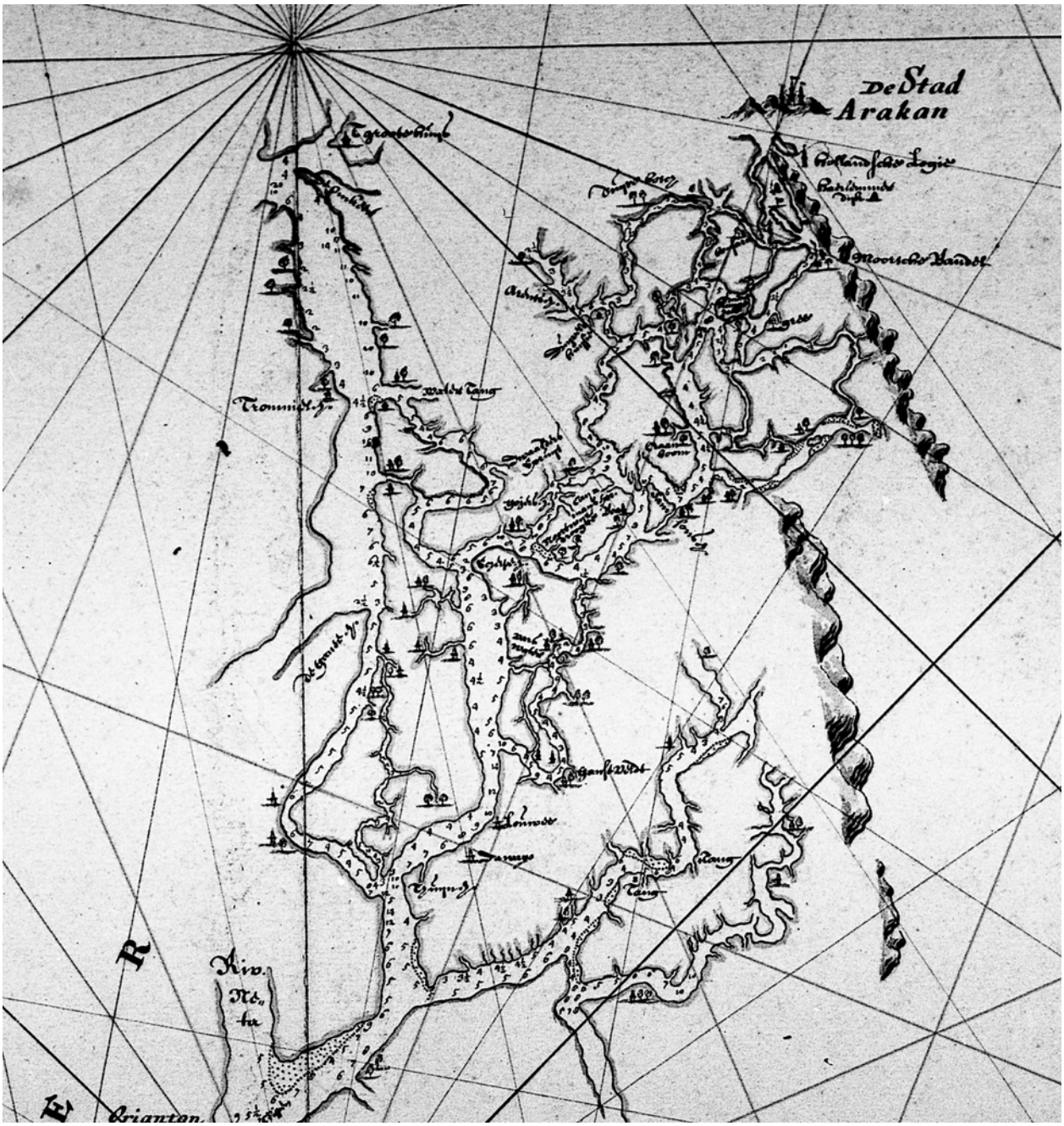
The preferred and most commonly used method to buy rice by the VOC was to lend small local farmers or traders money for which they would provide the VOC with rice against a fixed price. The price was determined at the time the money was advanced. This method was used both by VOC officials sent from Arakan to Chittagong and by the chief of the factory in Arakan itself.[38] This method involved large numbers of people, usually between

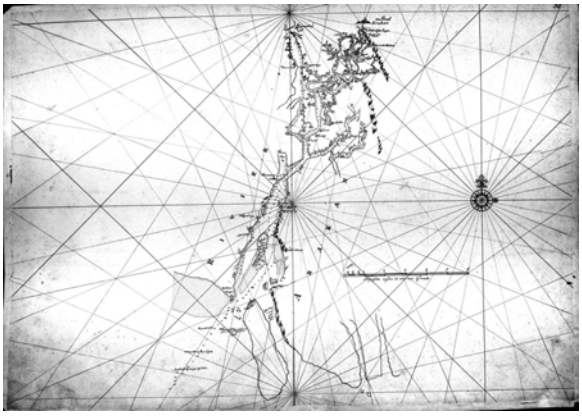
[34] NA VOC 1151, fol. 622-634 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 30 October 1643.
[35] The VOC also engaged in the rice trade in Arakan itself. The company charged a 50% interest on rice sold during the rainy season. For every 100 *maten* distributed, 150 *maten* would have to be repaid after the harvest. NA VOC 1125, fol. 477-485 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan 10 January 1637.
[36] NA VOC 1096, fol. 136-137 Letter from Martinus Lowijsen and Roelof Cornelisz Kan to Marten Ijsbrantsz in Pulicat, dated Arakan 21 October 1628.
[37] On the 1636-1638 monopoly of the *laskhar-wazir* see NA VOC 858, fol. 534-539 Letter from Batavia to Adam van der Mandere, dated Batavia 21 July 1636 and NA VOC 1125, fol. 477-485 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan 10 January 1637. For the 1657-1662 monopoly the treasurer paid the king 1,000 Rupees for the right to exploit the monopoly, see NA VOC 1221, fol. 484-491 Letter from Hendrik de Dieu to Batavia, dated Arakan 10 March 1657 and NA VOC 1240, fol. 1555-1560 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg and Jacob van der Plancken to Batavia, dated Arakan 7 December 1662., fol. 1559-1559v.
[38] NA VOC 1125, fol. 477-485 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan 10 January 1637.

100 and 200 contracts were made this way. The contractors were not all farmers, some would use the money advanced to them to contract themselves with rice farmers to buy paddy after the harvest. The VOC's contractors would pound the paddy they had bought, so that the VOC would receive the rice directly from them. The contractors almost all lived near the VOC factory.[39] There were no large brokers involved. In 1644 for example Arent van der Helm ordered rice for 5,000 Tanka from more than 250 different farmers for 2.5 Tanka each *carre*. This way rice could be bought at prices considerably below market conditions. The same rice was valued at 2.75 to 3 Tanka when bought on the market following the harvest.[40] If we assume that the 250 contractors in 1644 would have needed to provide 2,000 *carre* (415,000 kg), a contractor then would on average need to supply 8 *carre* or 1,660 kg rice, bought from different farmers or villages. Today figures of contemporary rice yields are shown to vary between c. 1,500 kg per hectare[41] in some places in Africa to c. 3,200 kg on average in Asia. These figures would indicate that the VOC bought its rice not from large landowners, but from petty farmers. This suggestion is substantiated by the fact that Van der Helm usually describes the contractors as 'families' or 'poor people'.[42] The detail from a VOC map of the Kaladan river from the late seventeenth century reproduced below seems to confirm Van der Helms statements that the main rice producing area of Arakan was situated on the north-eastern banks of the Kaladan river between Urittaung and Mrauk U. It is this area that is depicted with the greatest detail, the rest of the Kaladan valley was not surveyed in great detail.

Next page: Map of the Kaladan river, with a detail of the main rice producing area around Mrauk U[43]

[39] NA VOC 1151, fol. 622-634 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 30 October 1643.
[40] NA VOC 1155, fol. 479-487 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 3 February 1645.
[41] 100 m^2 or 2.47 acres. V.N. Nguyen, *Rice Information* Vol. 3 (FAO: Rome 2002), Chapter 1.
[42] NA VOC 1155, fol. 493-516 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 31 October 1644.
[43] NA VEL 261. Isaak de Graaf, Kaart van de Rivier van Arracan, van de Mond tot de Stad van dien naam [n.d.]: 1:281,300.


De Stad
Arakan



In the early seventeenth century the ease with which rice could be bought in Arakan meant that the company did not feel the need to establish a permanent factory in Arakan. Instead during the years following the embassy of 1627 the VOC decided to withdraw its personnel from Arakan. VOC crews arriving in Arakan had in previous years been able to buy rice and slaves on the spot. The extra costs of keeping a factory in Arakan were therefore deemed to be not in accordance with the benefits of a permanent factory.[44] Free merchants operating from Batavia would be allowed to trade to Arakan even after the strict protocol laid down by the VOC's directors in 1631 came into force. The price of rice in Batavia or for example Banda was during the 1620s about 400 to 600% higher than in Arakan. Coen wrote to the governor of Banda in 1629 that he should sell the rice from Arakan at between forty and fifty *reals of eight* for each *last* (1,482 kg).[45] In Batavia rice prices had even gone to sixty *reals of eight*, while rice from Siam cost between 47 and 42 *reals of eight*. Arakanese rice was bought at about 21 Tanka for a *last* (1,482 kg), which would average out on about 10 *reals of eight*. In the end the presence of free merchants in Arakan was felt to be disadvantageous to the VOC.[46] In 1634 the Council at Batavia decided to 'extend the commerce of Batavia and embrace the trade of Bengal, Pegu and Arakan'.[47] This resulted in the establishment of a permanent factory in Arakan in 1635.

Data on the mainstay of the seventeenth century Arakanese economy, the rice trade, can only be found in the archives of the VOC. The description below of this important sector of the Arakanese economy is therefore heavily influenced by Dutch perspectives. The following pages will focus on the development of the market during the seventeenth century.

In 1608 Pieter Willemsz and Jan Gerritsz Ruyll who headed the first Dutch trading mission to Arakan, sold their goods for 3,600 Tanka. In return Man Raja-kri promised to supply them with 1200 *carre* (249,500 kg)[48] rice. The price of rice would thus be 3 Tanka each *carre* (207.5 kg). In February Willemsz departed on board a ship of the Arakanese king, destined for Coromandel. Ruyll was left in Arakan to buy the remaining 250 *carre* (51,875 kg). In March 1608 Ruyll had to leave Arakan, with a cargo of 1044 *carre* (216,630 kg). The

[44] Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp. 7:1445-1447 Letter from Marten IJsbrantsz to Coen, dated Masulipatnam 17 September 1628; Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp 5:516 Letter from Coen to Marten IJsbrantsz., dated Batavia 12 May 1629.

[45] A last at this time was equal to 3,000 Amsterdam pounds. An Amsterdam pound equalled 494 gram. A last therefore is c. 1,482 kg.

[46] *Dagh-register* 1631-1634, p. 65 entry for 6 March 1632. The reasons why this was felt to be disadvantageous are not clear.

[47] *Omme voorders haere Ed. maxima nopende d'extensie van commercie te erlangen, ende waer te nemen, alle t'gene de Comp. tegen haer swaere lasten eenich soulaes soude connen toebrengen, hebben wij voorgenomen, den handelvan Bengala, Pegu ende Aracan te embrasseeren. Dagh-register* 1631-1634, pp. 352-353 entry for 12 July 1634.

[48] A *carre* weighted 420 Amsterdam pounds. An Amsterdam pound equalled 494 gram so that one *carre* would be equal to 207.48 kilo. NA VOC 1082, fol. 66 Instruction for the council of the ships *Medenblik, Vreede, Tenasserim,* and *Bonne Remedie* dated Pulicat 25 August 1624.

king's treasurer, or *xama*[49], had increased the price to 3.25 Tanka each *carre* (207.5 kg), after the departure of Willemsz.This price was not acceptable for Ruyll. Ruyll claimed that a Muslim merchant from Coromandel, Muhammad Beg, was behind the price increase, but we can easily imagine that the king's treasurer had also something to gain as he received a part of the import and export duties that normally would have been paid. Man Raja-kri had promised the VOC a toll-free trade, so that not only the king, but also his nobles were set to loose out on the duty-free transactions of the VOC. Ruyll exported the rice to Aceh, freighting a ship of the *malik-i tujjar* headed for Sumatra.[50] Ruyll explained that the price of rice had been negotiated with the treasurer and *manjlis*, the representative of all foreign merchants in Arakan, with the merchants Haji Baba and the aforementioned *malik-i tujjar* as witnesses.[51] In 1612 Jacob Dircksz Cortenhoeff had commissioned the building of a yacht, the *Groene Papegaai*, in Arakan for the service of the VOC in Asia. Cortenhoeff bought rice for the carpenters and other craftsmen working on the yacht at 2 Tanka each *carre* (207.5 kg).[52] In 1624 the price of rice still remained at about 2 Tanka each *carre* (207.5 kg).[53]

When in September 1627 the first Arakanese embassy arrived in Batavia the Arakanese had noticed that the Dutch settlement was almost stricken by a great famine after Mataram had laid siege to the city in 1628.[54] The importance of Arakanese rice for the survival of Batavia was thus immediately impressed upon the envoys. The Dutch entertained mixed feelings about the Arakanese presence in Batavia. On the one hand the diplomatic exchanges would provide the much needed rice to feed the city's populace; on the other hand the ambassadors would return with the knowledge of exactly how crucial Arakanese rice was

[49] In VOC sources mostly written as Sangma or Cachma.
[50] *Malik-i tujjar*, the chief merchant of a port. In this case perhaps the chief merchant from Aceh. In the source he is named *Moluque Tujar*.
[51] NA VOC 1055 Letters and papers from Aceh n.f. nr. 1 Letter from Jan Gerritsz Ruyll on board the ship of Moluque Tujar to the next VOC representative arriving in Arakan, dated Arakan 27 March 1608 and nr. 2 Letter from Jan Gerritsz Ruyll to Jacques L'Hermite in Banten, dated Aceh 20 July 1608.
[52] NA VOC 625 Accounts of the yacht *Groene Papegaai* in Arakan, kept by Jacob Dircksz Cortenhoeff between 8 January and 8 march 1612. The accounts also shed some light on construction methods. The first entry in the account book is for the costs incurred for bringing on land a large *prahu*. It seems this *prahu* was used as the ships bottom. After this had been done 28 large beams were bought to be sawn into planks, cane was used to make ropes, iron was bought to make nails and bolts. The yacht had at least one mast. The total cost was 910 Tanka. The ship was launched only after the earth had been dug from underneath the keel. Three years later Hans de Haze again ordered for Pulicat an Arakanese ship, capable of carrying one or two canon and with oars as well as sails to fight against the Portuguese on the Coromandel coast. NA VOC 1059, fol. 58-59 Instructions for Andreas Crieck, in Arakan from Hans de Haze, dated Pulicat 5 May 1615. In 1624 again two *jelias* were ordered for Coromandel. NA VOC 1082, fol. 64-65 Instruction for Dirck van Haps from Marten IJsbrantsz, dated Pulicat 25 April 1624.
[53] NA VOC 1082, fol. 66 Instruction for the council of the ships *Vreede* and *Medenblick*. Price reported as 1 real of eight for a *carre*. As one real of eight equalled 50 stivers and the Tanka was valued at 24 stivers.
[54] Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp 5:295-296 Letter from Coen to Marten IJsbrantsz., dated Batavia 14 June 1628; Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp 5:306-309 Instruction from Coen for Martinus Lowijszen and council with the *fluijt* Edam destined for Arakan, dated Batavia 15 June 1628. Mataram besieged Batavia in 1628 and 1629. Coen died during the siege as a result of disease. H.E. Niemeijer, *Batavia. Een koloniale samenleving in de 17de eeuw* (Amersfoort: Balans, 2005), pp. 24-25; Raben, *Batavia and Colombo*, p. 12.

for the survival of Batavia and how cheap it was in comparison with Batavian prices. The marked price difference was indeed sufficient reason to discourage the sending of Arakanese envoys to Batavia.[55]

In 1636 rice was estimated to cost the VOC in Arakan 3.5 Tanka each *carre* (207.5 kg), including transport and other costs incurred in Arakan. From at least the 1630s the VOC cooperated closely with the leaders of the Portuguese community in Arakan and Chittagong. Rice from Chittagong was brought on board ships of the *capitão mor* of the Portuguese Manuel Rodrigo Tigre. The close cooperation with the Portuguese *chatins* even moved the VOC to supply these men with VOC passes so that they could trade unmolested throughout the Indian Ocean. Tigre and other leaders of the Portuguese community, like Diogo de Sá, were also allowed to freight VOC ships heading for Batavia.[56] In February 1636 Batavia received 2,071 *carre* (429,732.5 kg) rice, half of which was immediately sent on to Ambon and the Banda islands. The amount of rice from Arakan would feed a population of approximately 3,000 persons for one year. In February and March 1637 three ships, *Oostkapelle*, *Ruttem* and *Otter* brought 471.5 *last* (698,763 kg) rice, enough to feed circa 5,000 people a whole year.[57] Batavia had in 1632 8,060 inhabitants, Ambon and Banda counted in 1625 820 company servants.[58] It has to be understood that the amounts asked for in 1636 and 1637 were rather low as the VOC had again received rice from Mataram.[59] Batavia in fact only wanted 400 to 500 *last* (between 592,800 and 741,000 kg) for 1637. Still from these figures the crucial importance of Arakanese rice for the survival of Batavia and the Spice Islands can easily be understood. The Arakan factory was a kind of life insurance for the VOC. In times of war with Mataram or Banten the company would be able to count on Arakan to supply Batavia and the Spice Islands with rice. The cheapness of Arakanese rice was in itself of course also a good reason to maintain a factory in Arakan.

The establishment of a permanent factory was directly followed by the attempt to create a monopoly in the rice trade in Arakan by two high ranking court officials, Ashraf Khan the *lashkar-wazir* and the king's treasurer who was also the king's chief merchant. The fact that at the same time VOC employees in Arakan were stimulated to participate in the rice trade in Arakan itself to defray the VOC's operating costs in Arakan, could very well have

[55] Colenbrander, *Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf*, pp 5:451-453 Letter from Coen to president Vischer in Banda, dated Batavia 25 January 1629.
[56] NA VOC 858, fol. 534-539 Letter from Batavia to Adam van der Mandere, dated Batavia 21 June 1636; NA VOC 867, fol. 298 Letter from Batavia to Diogo de Sá, dated Batavia 16 May 1643. Diogo de Sá was allowed to ship on his own risk on VOC ships to Batavia annually goods worth about 200 to 300 Tanka. See also NA VOC 1151, fol. 622-634 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 30 October 1643.
[57] The *last* was set to 3,000 pounds when calculating rice shipments. The World Food Programme of the United Nations recons 144 kilo rice per person per annum as a minimum.
[58] Raben, *Batavia and Colombo*, p. 85; Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, pp. 84-85.
[59] NA VOC 858, fol. 778 Letter from Batavia to Adam van der Mandere, dated Batavia 13 September 1636.

contributed to the attempts by the court to establish the monopoly.[60] In 1636 the VOC in Arakan bought 11,840 *sandons*[61] paddy (rice in the husk) after the harvest. They hoped to sell this during the rainy season with a good profit. This first attempt was not a total success. Only 5,000 *sandons* were eventually given out on loan, they would be repaid next season when the farmers would provide the VOC with 150 *maten* (1,556.3 kg)[62] for every 100 *maten* (1,073.5 kg) they had borrowed from the company. The entry of the VOC on the internal market for rice was evidently not well received by the king and the Arakanese nobility. The sale of rice to the VOC was prohibited on pain of corporal punishment and a rice monopoly was established in 1637. In 1637 the VOC bought 1,000 *carre* (207,500 kg) from the *lashkar-wazir* for between 4 and 4.5 Tanka per *carre* (207.5 kg), which according to Adam van der Mandere was about 1.5 Tanka above market conditions, which averaged between 2.5 to 3 Tanka each *carre*. Rice prices had been double the year before as a result of the famines that had struck Arakan between 1631 and 1634.[63] On the whole the price of rice seemed remarkably stable between 1608 and 1637, averaging at between 2 and 3 Tanka when the harvests had been good. The monopoly of the *lashkar-wazir* was resented by the VOC, but even with the monopoly in place the price of rice in Arakan was still so low that the governor-general and council in Batavia wanted to avoid an all out confrontation with the Arakanese.[64] The monopoly was even attributed to the weakness of the chief of the VOC factory in Arakan, Adam van der Mandere. In 1638 rice prices plunged to a low of 1.9 Tanka. This time the VOC only paid 0.125 Tanka above the market price.[65] The VOC however did not buy large quantities of rice this time because in 1638 and 1639 rice imports in Batavia from Mataram had provided the VOC with enough grain to supply the city for the time being. The fact that rice could only be bought with silver, which was always in short supply, was a major set back. Arakanese rice was however still 85% cheaper than Javanese rice imported from Mataram. Batavia therefore continued to send ships to Arakan to buy rice. As we will see in the next paragraph, the fact that Arakan also promised a rich supply of slaves was another important reason to keep a permanent factory in Arakan.[66]

In 1640 Batavia requested only about 300 to 400 *last* rice.[67] After the conquest by the VOC of Melaka in 1641 the VOC felt it would need to depend less on Arakan for its imports

[60] NA VOC 858, fol. 778 Letter from Batavia to Adam van der Mandere, dated Batavia 13 September 1636.
[61] An as yet unspecified Arakanese weight.
[62] 1 *carre* equalled 20 *maten*.
[63] Paddy was valued at 4.5 Tanka for 100 *maten* (ie. 5 *carre* or 1073.5 kg), this would gain about 2 *carre* (415 kg) white rice. NA VOC 1125, fol. 477-485 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan 10 January 1637.
[64] NA VOC 859, fol.797-809 Letter from Batavia to Adam van der Mandere, dated Batavia 11 September 1637.
[65] NA VOC 1126, fol.291-297 Letter from Adam van der Mandere to Batavia, dated Arakan November 1638, fol.
[66] NA VOC 863, fol. 479-485 Letter from Batavia to Adam van der Mandere, dated Batavia 6 august 1639.
[67] NA VOC 864, fol. 437 Letter from Batavia to Arent van der Helm, dated Batavia 9 August 1640.

of rice. The same year Batavia imported more than 2,000 *last* (2,964,000 kg) of rice from Mataram. The VOC chief in Arakan, Arent van der Helm, was ordered to concentrate on buying slaves instead of rice.[68] The following year Batavia was reminded how much they still depended on rice from Mataram when sultan Agung (1613-1646) decided to prohibit rice exports following a bad harvest.[69] Van der Helm was ordered to buy at least 600 *last* (889,200 kg) rice. This would have been enough to feed about 6,000 people for one year, or perhaps 75% of the Batavian population.[70] In Arakan 1642 was also a bad year for the rice harvest. The twofold increase in VOC demand moved king Narapati-kri to ask the VOC to voluntarily limit its rice purchases. The letters of Van der Helm to Batavia are on the one hand full of indignation about Arakanese accusations that the buying of rice by the VOC led to the starvation of poor people in Arakan because VOC demand had such an impact on market prices. On the other hand Van der Helm admits that rice prices in Arakan had not been as high in twelve years as they were in 1643.[71] Prices were reported to have risen in 1643 to 3 Tanka each *carre* (207.5 kg), which was indeed substantially higher than they had been the preceding years, but still on the same level as during the first three decades of the seventeenth century. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the sharp increase in VOC demand in 1642 had a substantial impact on the rice market in Arakan. The large influx of people from Bengal from 1644, combined with bad harvests meant rice prices increased in 1644 and 1645 from 3 to 4.75 Tanka for each *carre (*207.5 kg), which meant more than a 50% increase. The bad harvest and the increase in population meant that large numbers of people died of starvation.[72] The harvests of 1645 and 1646 brought prices down. In October 1646 paddy was going at 6 Tanka for 100 *maten*, coming to 3 Tanka for each *carre* rice, excluding costs of pounding and transport. Satuidhammaraja again prohibited rice sales to the VOC and tried to force Van der Helm to buy rice from the treasurer for about 6 Tanka each *carre*.[73] The resettlement of large groups of Bengalis from the Chittagong area, in combination with several bad harvests had effectively increased the price of rice from 3 to 6 Tanka. This increase in price resulted in

[68] NA VOC 865, fol. 526-530 Letter from Batavia to Arent van der Helm, dated Batavia 19 October 1641.
[69] NA VOC 866, fol. 299-303 Letter from Batavia to Arent van der Helm, dated Batavia 31 May 1642.
[70] The same amount was requested from Coromandel.
[71] After a long discussion on the unreasonable ban on rice exports by Narapati, Van der Helm admits that rice prices had never been this high in the past decade and that he could understand that the king had asked the VOC not to buy more rice than needed for the subsistence of the factory. He only clearly disagreed with the Arakanese court who maintained that these price rises were due to VOC demand. Subrahmanyam clearly missed this point when he described Van der Helm's response to the export ban as a discourse by Van der Helm on "tyranny". NA VOC 1151, fol. 622-634 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 30 October 1643, fol. 622v-623; 626v and Subrahmanyam, 'Slaves and Tyrants', p. 229.
[72] In 1644 old paddy was valued at 4.5 to 5, and new paddy at between 5.5 and 6 Tanka for 100 *maten* which would yield about 2 *carren* rice. In 1645 prices rose to between 7.5 to 9.5 Tanka. NA VOC 1155, fol. 479-487 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 3 February 1645; Diary of Van der Helm 1645, entry for 26 to 30 June and NA VOC 1159, fol. 369-383 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 31 October 1645.
[73] NA VOC 1163, fol. 178-191 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 31 October 1646, fol. 184-187v.

mass starvation in Arakan itself, the groups most affected were of course the recently arrived Bengalis. For the VOC this had a significant side effect, famine conditions had a positive effect on the supply of slaves. From 1643 VOC exports of rice had dwindled because of the export ban, VOC demand could therefore not have been a major cause in the sharp increase of rice prices after 1643.

After the departure of the VOC in 1647, information on rice prices in Arakan is again only available from 1653 when the company again returned. It seems that after 1653 the price of rice had again come down to an average of 3 Tanka. Information on rice prices is however not easily deducted from VOC material after 1653. Cargoes sent from Arakan to Batavia are during this period generally valued as a whole, with no information on the price of separate goods. The quantity of rice exported from Arakan is however seen to increase considerably. In 1662 for example VOC factors were able to buy 5,600 *carre* (1,162,000 kg) within only three weeks. It seems that during the 1653-1665 period exports were constrained only by the number of ships the VOC sent to Arakan.[74] It is possible that the sudden increase in population from 1643 had led in the long run to an increase in the area cultivated in Arakan, which in turn made more rice available for export. Batavia would need Arakanese rice badly during the second half of the 1650s when the *susuhunan* of Mataram closed all Javanese ports to VOC shipping and prohibited the export of rice. As mentioned in the introduction to this paragraph in 1656 Batavia reminded its factors in Arakan that they had not received rice from Java in 6 to 12 months and that Batavia expected Arakan to supply as much rice as could be obtained to 'feed this large body'.[75]

In 1665 the VOC again left Arakan to return in 1677. In 1677 rice prices appeared to have continued to fall to about between 2 and 3 Tanka each *carre* (207.5 kg). In 1682 the price stood at only 2.5 Tanka.[76] It appears that the price of rice in Arakan had remained stable throughout the seventeenth century at between 2 and 3 Tanka during normal years. Bad harvests would of course occasionally result in a temporary sharp increase in prices. The high prices following the resettlement program of the 1640s combined with bad harvests remain the only exception to this rule. The mass deportation initiated by Narapati-kri in 1643 resulted in sharp increases in the price of rice and almost everything else. Rice prices more than doubled during these years and resulted in famine. High rice prices continued at least until 1647. It is reasonable to assume that they continued well into the early years of

[74] NA VOC 1240, fol. 216-224 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg and Jacob van der Plancken to Batavia, dated Arakan 31 January 1662, fol. 219.

[75] '*dat den rijs hier doorgaens schaers omkomt, ende ons in groote quantiteijt van andere plaetsen dient te werden versorcht, om dit groote lichaem te spijsighen ende niet verleegen te vallen*'. NA VOC 880, fol. 459-462 Letter from Batavia to Hendrik de Dieu, dated Batavia 22 July 1656, see also NA VOC 881, fol. 395-401 Letter from Batavia to Hendrik de Dieu, dated Batavia 20 August 1657; NA VOC 881, fol. 534-536 Letter from Batavia to Hendrik de Dieu, dated Batavia 30 October 1657.

[76] NA VOC 1339, fol. 918-924 Letter from Jacob van der Plancken to Batavia, dated Arakan 13 January 1678 and *Dagh-register* 1682 1.704-705 entry for 4 June 1682.

Candasudhammaraja's reign. The temporary cessation of taxation during the first three years of Candasudhammaraja's reign from 1652 to 1655 suggests that during these years extraordinary measures were needed to revive the Arakanese economy. After 1684 the peace with Banten enabled the VOC to obtain rice from sources closer to Batavia. This meant Arakanese rice was not needed anymore to secure a steady food supply for Batavia and the Spice Islands.

8.4 Slave trade

In 1574 the Mughal Emperor Akbar defeated Daud Khan in a battle near Patna. For almost a whole century following this victory Bengal was the scene of an intense struggle between the Arakanese, Mughals and local lords.[77] In these battles the Arakanese would prove to be the toughest adversary the Mughals would encounter. As a result of the ensuing Mughal-Arakanese wars a trade in Bengal slaves developed in south-eastern Bengal during the seventeenth century. It is my contention that the demand for slaves from the VOC fundamentally changed the nature of this trade in Arakan and Bengal.[78]

The VOC needed slaves for a wide variety of purposes. The spice plantations on Ambon and the Banda islands could not be operated without the use of slave labour, and Batavia itself was also largely dependant on slave labour.[79] Already in the early years of the seventeenth century VOC officials in Asia requested permission from the VOC's board in the Netherlands to operate the company's spice plantations with the help of slave labour. The use of slaves was not something that was agreed upon by all high ranking VOC officials. In 1617 the admiral Streven van der Haghen reminded the Amsterdam chamber that he had always been in favour of the use of slaves but had been opposed by the governor-general Pieter Both (1610-1614), who had deemed it inappropriate for Christians to use slaves. Pieter Both had at several moments set free slaves that had been captured by Van der Haghen. Frederik de Houtman as governor of Ambon had likewise refused to use slaves as company servants.[80]

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[77] Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, pp. 137-158 cf. Sarkar, *History of Bengal* , passim.

[78] For a good overview of Indian Ocean slave trade and the leading role of the VOC see Markus Vink, '"The world's oldest trade": Dutch slavery and slave trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of World History* 14 (2003), <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jwh/14.2/vink.html> (24 Dec. 2007).

[79] Raben, *Batavia and Colombo*, pp. 109-130; Niemeijer, *Batavia*, passim; Vink, 'The world's oldest trade', paras. 22-25

[80] NA VOC 1064, fol. 194- 202 Letter from Steven van der Haghen to the chamber Amsterdam, dated Ambon 26 May 1617, fol. 200-201v. '*Ick hebbe U.Ed. voor desen geschreven dat ons slaven so nodich syn sonder die qualicken huis te houden is […] Hadden van die tyt aff dat ick met myn vlote voor Mossambique was mogen naer myn sin gaen souden die nu geen gebreck hebben. Men liet daer ettelicke hondert lopen die by ons verovert waren om aen die menschen een christenlick werck te bewisen. [...] Dat meer is Amboina verovert synde anno 1605 quam daer een Corre corre van Burro met over die hondert Tidoresen onse vianden menende te comen onder een Portegeschen armada, maer quamen ons inde handt. Daer ick blyde om was dat ons Godt in sulcken noot so een hoop slaven thoe sondt maer Houtman die doen noch by de selve opinie was als voor Mossambiques seide dattet niet christelicken en was slaven te houden. Daer de Portegisen in Amboina wel inne verwondert*

In 1621 with a show of brutal force the Dutch governor-general Jan-Pietersz. Coen established VOC control over the Banda archipelago. Coen forcibly removed or killed most of the indigenous population of the Banda islands, estimated at 15,000 people. This horrifying act left the VOC in the possession of the world's only source of nutmeg and mace, but without workers to tend the nutmeg gardens. Coen introduced on Banda a plantation system with so-called *perkeniers*, or keepers of the nutmeg gardens. The VOC provided the *perkeniers* with slaves to do the work for them. The slaves needed for the Spice Islands such as Banda were until 1624 bought or captured in a fairly haphazard way. From 1623 onwards the VOC would find a structural supply of slaves on the Arakanese market.[81] Demand for slaves increased when in 1634 180,000 new nutmeg trees were planted, and more and more trees were to be planted during the following decades. On Banda natural disasters such as several severe earthquakes in the 1620's, a tsunami in 1629, and virulent diseases in the 1630's meant that demand for slaves remained high for at least the whole seventeenth century.[82] The high labour costs in the Southeast Asian port cities were another factor in the European demand for Asian slaves.[83] Batavia was to become essentially a slave society.[84] The sustained demand from a single large buyer had a profound effect on the slave trade in Arakan and Bengal. In the following paragraphs it will be argued that the Arakan slave trade transformed from supply to demand driven.

The reports of the trade in the Bay of Bengal at the start of the seventeenth century by Willemsz and Cortenhoef quoted in the introduction to this Chapter are remarkably silent about a possible trade in slaves. VOC reports describing market conditions in Mrauk U itself

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waren dat men so een schone hoop slaven liet lopen. Vraechden als wy geen slaven wilden houwen wy ons werck soude doen. Sonder twifel hebben se onder malcanderen geseit dat wy een hoop beesten waren die so veel niet en wisten Ick hebbe U.Ed voor dese oock geadviseert dat men vant eylant Madagascar aende binnen cant aen de noort syde [...] Dat men daer slaven genoech can becomen om twee realen van achten ende min elcke swarte doch daer dienen vrouwen oock te wesen so houdt mense best inde dienst & by een. Die kinderen dise procreeren blyven al slaven vanden heer ende di Madagascars syn goeden aert van slaven […]Aen eygen slaven is ons veel aengelegen die en can men niet missen. Watten slechten dingen is dat van generael Bot geweest die so veel slaven vry gegeven heeft. t'Ware beter dat hy goudt ofte silver noch had gegeven een slave die wat is gelt nu in Amboina 80, 90 & over de hondert realen.' The issue was debated in the Dutch Republic from the late sixteenth century. P.C. Emmer, *De Nederlandse slavenhandel 1500-1850* 2nd revd. ed. (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 2003), pp. 34-35.

[81] From 1626 onwards slaves were difficult to procure on the Coromandel coast. As the economy prospered it meant that less people needed to sell themselves or their relatives as slaves because of their debts. Before 1626 slaves on the coast reportedly came not only from Golconda, but also from Malabar and Cotchin. Letter by Pieter de Carpentier, dated 3-1-1624 and 3-2-1626 published in W.Ph. Coolhaas ed. *Generale Missiven van Goeverneur-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der VOC* 2 Vols. (Martinus Nijhof The Hague 1960-1964) Vol. 1. Vink, 'The world's oldest trade', paras. 53-57.

[82] Banda had in 1638 3,842 inhabitants of which 2,190 slaves, in 1640 there were only 1,120 inhabitants left, in 1642 4,290 souls, in 1645 3,525 and in 1663 there were 5,103 people on Banda. The population of Banda would never again reach its estimated size of 15,000. V.I. van de Wall 'Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis der Perkeniers, 1621-1671', *Tijdschrift voor de Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van het Koninklijk Bataviaas Genoodschap* 74 (1934), pp. 516-580.

[83] S. Arasaratnam, 'Slave trade in the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth century' in K.S. Mathew ed., *Mariners, Merchants and Oceans* (Delhi: Manohar, 1995), pp. 197-199.

[84] Vink, 'The world's oldest trade', para 25; Niemeijer, *Batavia* passim.

are also devoid of any information regarding the slave trade. In 1608 Jan Gerritsz Ruyll reported from Mrauk U to company headquarters in Banten about market conditions at Mrauk U. Ruyll spoke of the rice trade, the market for cloth, and on the subject of various other commodities. Slaves were however not among the items listed by Ruyll.[85] It is clear that the VOC was at this time not particularly interested in slaves. It is however unlikely that the slave trade would have been left out of the aforementioned reports had it existed at that time. The VOC was in Asia with the primary goal of making a profit. If there had been a trade in slaves in Arakan it would most likely have been mentioned in the reports cited here.[86] The absence of references to the slave trade before the early seventeenth century is also noted by Subrahmanyam.[87] Although a large market for the export of slaves does not seem to exist before the early seventeenth century, this is not to say slavery did not exist. Incessant warfare between the Mughals, the Arakanese, the Portuguese, and the Burmese would have provided anyone of these parties with large numbers of captured enemies who would have become slaves in the hands of their captors.[88] The Bengal frontier provided moreover a classic example of what J.C. Heesterman has termed the "inner frontier"; where tribal peoples of hunter-gatherers, shifting cultivators, and pastoral nomads in the interior forest and hill tracts were separated from sedentary rice farmers of the coastal and riverine floodplains. With the expansion of the agricultural frontier these forest and pastoral peoples, together with other outsiders without community protection, were reduced to various degrees of dependency upon landed households.[89] Debt slavery no doubt existed as well before the arrival of the VOC. It seems however that by this time slaves were not sold from Arakanese or Bengal ports in large quantities on an open market as they would be in years to come.

The successful wars of king Sirisudhammaraja against the Mughal empire in Bengal inaugurated the large scale intra-Asian trade in slaves from Arakan. The wars of

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[85] NA VOC 1055 Brieven en papieren uit Atchin n.f. nr. 1 Copie missive van Jan Gerritsz. Ruyll uyt het schip van Mollicque Tusajer aen den raedt der schepen commende in Arracan, in dato 27 maart 1608 [Letters from Atjeh n.f. nr. 1 Copy of a letter from Jan Gerritsz. Ruyll on board the ship of Mollicque Tusajer written to the council of captains of the next ships arriving in Arakan, dated 27-3-1608].

[86] Ruyll for example is thinking aloud in his letter to his colleagues about what to do with the money he had left after the sale of his cargo to the king. NA VOC 1055 Ruyll 1608.

[87] Sanjay Subrahmanyam in his article 'Slaves and Tyrants in Mrauk U' explored some aspects of Dutch trade with Arakan during the seventeenth century. Subrahmanyam observes that Mughal sources are silent as well on slave trade in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century in this part of the Bay of Bengal. He has suggested that the slave trade in Arakan should be thought of as a seventeenth century phenomenon. Subrahmanyam, 'Slaves and Tyrants', pp. 209.

[88] Cf. for North India D.H.A. Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy: The Ethnohistory of a Military Labour Market in Hindustan, 1450-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 10-11. See also Arasaratnam, 'Slave trade', pp. 200-207 and Vink, 'The world's oldest trade', paras. 25-46.

[89] Vink, 'The world's oldest trade', para 40 quoting J.C. Heesterman, 'Warrior, Peasant and Brahmin', *Modern Asian Studies* 29.3 (1995), pp. 637–54; J. C. Heestermann, 'The Hindu Frontier', *Itinerario* 13.1 (1989), pp.1–16; J. C. Heestermann, 'Littoral et Interieur de l'Inde' in L. Blussé, H. L. Wesseling, and G.D. Winius, eds., *History and Underdevelopment: Essays on Underdevelopment and European Expansion in Asia and Africa* (Leiden, 1980), pp. 87–92.

Sirisudhammaraja coincided with the start of VOC control over the Spice Islands and the foundation of Batavia in 1619 and the resulting need for slaves in the archipelago. Sirisudhammaraja started his wars in 1622 with a campaign directed at Dakhin Shabazpur and other parts of the Meghna delta. In 1624, Bhalua was raided, in 1625 Sripur was taken, and in 1626 Dhaka was sacked and tens of thousands were taken as slaves to Arakan.[90] The other campaigns that are known to us are the 1632 large scale attack on Bengal which ironically drove the Portuguese from Pipli to Hugli from where they were removed the same year by the Mughals, and in 1633 an attack on Bengal with the help of ships of the *Estado da Índia* from Goa. This time the Arakanese were asked to aid the Portuguese crown in an attempted recovery of Hugli.[91]

Arakanese campaigns seem to have concentrated on the weaving areas in eastern Bengal at Dhaka, Sripur, and Sonargaon. This was the economic heart of Bengal and the area over which Arakan and the Mughals had each strived to gain control since the late sixteenth century. This part of Bengal potentially yielded the highest tax revenues.[92] The fact that the Arakanese did not sell any skilled slaves abroad supports the idea that for Sirisudhammaraja the attacks on Bengal were also a means to develop a weaving industry in Arakan itself with the expertise of Bengal craftsmen.[93] The VOC was from the beginning only allowed to buy slaves on the condition that they had arrived directly from Bengal and were not skilled in any craft or trade.[94]

The successes of Sirisudhammaraja's campaigns in eastern Bengal necessitated the Mughal governor of Bengal Islam Khan Mashhadi in 1637 to send an ambassador to Mrauk U with orders to negotiate a peace.[95] It is interesting to note that the Mughal governor expressly points the finger to the Portuguese as being the central elements in the slave trade. Subrahmanyam also cites contemporary European authors who claim the slave raids were the work of the Portuguese.[96] The records of the VOC confirm the idea that the Portuguese were the essential figures in this trade. On several occasions the Dutch factors remark that without Portuguese assistance the Arakanese would not go slave raiding in Bengal. As described in the previous Chapters in 1643 the Portuguese *chatins* assisted the chief of the royal bodyguard, the *ko-ran-kri* in an attempt to dethrone king Narapati. When this attempt failed

[90] NA VOC 1087 Report on Arakan by Jan van der Burch 170r-172v.
[91] Letters of the governor-general at Batavia in Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven* Vol. 1 passim. In April 1633 in Mrauk U there were four frigates and a galleon sent by the Portuguese *viso-rey*, see *Dagh-register* 1631-1634, entry for 8 Februari 1634.
[92] NA VOC 1057, fol. 127-140 Letter from Wemmer van Berchem to Pieter Both in Batavia, dated Masulipatnam 16 August 1614, fol. 129v-130. Van Berchem confirms Bengal was especially important to the Arakanese because of its cloth production.
[93] This is also implicitly argued in Subrahmanyam's discussion of the slave trade in 'Slaves and Tyrants'.
[94] Ibidem.
[95] The *Daghregister* at Batavia records for 13 February 1637 a letter dated 31 January 1637 from Adam van der Mandere.
[96] Subrahmanyam, 'Slaves and Tyrants', pp. 213-214.

the local Portuguese did not return to Arakan fearing they would not escape punishment. The Dutch factor Arent van den Helm in 1643 foresaw that without the Portuguese the supply of slaves would dry out.[97] Van der Helm claimed that the Portuguese and their local crews were better soldiers who were used to fighting and confronting an enemy on an almost daily basis. According to him the Portuguese were far more willing to risk life and limp in battle than the Arakanese.[98] In 1653, after an absence of five years, VOC employees noted that the Portuguese had stopped bringing in slaves to Arakanese ports, but had instead moved their activities to other harbours in the Bay of Bengal, notably to Pipli. This confirms the idea that on the one hand Dutch demand was vital for the slave trade in Arakan and on the other that the Portuguese were the main actors when it came to slave raids.

The fact that the Portuguese renegades, sponsored by the Arakanese kings, went to war with the sole purpose of enslaving their enemies is a substantial deviation of earlier practice. S. Arasaratnam in his article on the seventeenth century slave trade already pointed out that although slavery existed in India and Southeast Asia long before the arrival of the European trading companies, the trade more or less remained a local affair and was mostly fed by poverty, which necessitated people to sell themselves or their family to buy or secure access to food or pay off debts.[99]

After the VOC's return in 1653, the Arakanese slave trade slowly recovered. Candasudhammaraja in 1652 freed 50 Portuguese who had been imprisoned by Satuidhammaraja. From 1654 onwards the Portuguese started bringing in to Mrauk U new slaves. Mrauk U would however never regain its status as the central slave market in the region. Pipli would from this time onwards be the preferred destination of the operation which was to become an exclusively Portuguese affair. Dianga was in the early 1650s still very much desolate and life in the Portuguese enclave in Bengal only slowly recovered from the crisis of the late 1640s.[100] Candasudhammaraja started regulating the slave trade from 1655, issuing *firmans* that specified the number and kind of slaves that could be exported as

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[97] Stephan van Galen, 'Arakan at the turn of the first millennium', pp. 158-159.

[98] '*Nu Bengalen geheel geraseert is en alle wevers als andere ambachtsluijden van daer herwaerts aengebracht werden soo sal nu den cleeden handel als mede den slaven incoop doer dies de portugeesen verloopen sijn voor ons daer weinich omt lijff hebben, ende soo deselve portugeesen niet weder comen staet te duchten hier jaerlijckx gheen hondert slaven sullen worden geprocureert, wandt de Mogen haer liff en leven soo niet sullen prucliteeren als dito portugeesen doen soo dat dan voorde Comp. weinigh sal sijn te versamelen dan rijs, witte doucken, negros cleeden als alderhande lijwaten slaedt dagelijckx seer op en staet te duchten noch vrij dierder sal worden soo den coninck Bengalen alle wevers ontreckt, dat wij verhopen van neen, hier sijn incorte dagen over de 5.000 huijsgesin uit Bengalen gebracht Barbiers, wevers, pottenbackers, timmerlieden als andere ambachtluijden, wordt oock geseijdt hij 't fordt Chittigam slechten sal, ende een sterker in Ramo laeten maecken, wat daer van coomen sal den tijdt leeren.*' NA VOC 1157, fol. 632-640 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 13 February 1644.

[99] Arasaratnam, 'Slave trade', passim.

[100] NA VOC 1202, fol. 397-407 Letter from David Verdonck and Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 25 January 1654 and NA VOC 1202, fol. 408-414 Letter from David Verdonck and Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 1 March 1654.

well as the place where they could be bought. In general the VOC would be allowed to export between 200 and 500 slaves each year during his reign. The export of Arakanese slaves, or slaves skilled in any art or craft was strictly prohibited.[101]

[101] NA VOC 1209, fol. 301-308 Letter from Hendrik de Dieu to Batavia, dated Arakan 8 Janaury 1655; NA VOC 1212, fol. 138-168 Letter from Hendrik de Dieu to Batavia, dated Arakan 3 November 1655; NA VOC 1236, fol. 887-892 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 26 March 1661; NA VOC 1236, fol. 892-901 Letter from Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 22 December 1661, fol. 898.

Slave market in Pipli: Lusu-Arakanese slave traders selling slaves to the VOC from Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie*

After 1653 it seems that the business of slave raiding became more and more an entirely Portuguese affair. From this time on taxes on the slave trade would not be levied per head, but the Portuguese would have to deliver one slave to the king for every four they brought into Arakan.[102] Selling their slaves in Pipli the Portuguese tried to evade the 25% tax as much as possible.[103] The departure of the VOC was not the only reason the slave market in Arakan had collapsed. The Arakanese economy had suffered greatly from the resettlement programmes and high taxation of the 1640s so that in Arakan itself there were not many people able to buy slaves. On top of this the VOC itself had started buying slaves in Pipli, much to the detriment of the Mrauk U market.[104] The withering of Arakanese control in eastern Bengal moreover meant that the number of slaves captured was also at a low. In 1655 for example the Portuguese brought to Dianga only 89 slaves. The Arakanese governor of Chittagong, the *Bo Man*, had taken a large number as a tax for the king and five in return for the freedom of a Portuguese still in gaol in Arakan.[105] The 1656 campaign of Shah Shuja in Bengal also had a negative effect on slave raiding. The Arakanese now effectively lost control over eastern Bengal. From 1659 to 1660 and from 1662 to 1665 the VOC would on average ship between 200 and 500 slaves from Arakan each year. Between the death of Shah Shuja (1661) in Arakan and the death of Mir Jumla (1663) the slave trade came to a halt due to fears over a pending Mughal invasion to avenge the death of the Mughal prince. After 1665 slave raids almost ceased. The price of slaves rocketed from between 15 to 20 Rupees for a man in 1654/5 to 40 to 48 Rupees in 1665 and 1678. Prices of women and children were considerably lower, but experienced the same increase. After the VOC returned to Arakan in 1677 slave raids were only conducted occasionally. In November 1678 for example seven *jelias* were reported to have captured circa 300 people. This was regarded by the Arakanese as a major success and led to the launch of a fleet of about 60 *jelias* in December the same year.[106] After 1677 rice was the main cargo of VOC ships returning to Batavia from Mrauk U, slaves only sporadically formed part of the cargo.

The practice of slave raiding

Perhaps the most revealing text on slave raiding is the 1650 instruction and commission for Pieter Cocqu regarding the VOC's military expedition to Arakan that year.[107] Cocqu was sent

[102] Roberts reports that in 1777 the king claimed the right to one fourth of the slaves captured in Bengal. Roberts adds that of the goods taken half of the proceeds go to the king. Roberts, 'An account of Arakan', p. 143.
[103] NA VOC 1212, fol. 138-168 Letter from Hendrik de Dieu and Gerrit van Voorburg to Batavia, dated Arakan 3 November 1655.
[104] Ibidem.
[105] NA VOC 1214, fol. 190-200v. Letter from Hendrik de Dieu to Batavia, dated Arakan 24 December 1655.
[106] NA VOC 1339, fol. 941v-944v Letter from Balthasar Hinlopen to Batavia, dated Arakan 15 December 1678.
[107] NA VOC 874, fol. 326-334 Commission and Instructions for Peter Cocque for the campaign against Arakan,

to Arakan with a dual commission, first he was to go slave raiding in Arakan itself, and second he was to seek an alliance with the ruler of Sandwip. The first part of his commission is of interest to us here. Cocqu had been the VOC's representative at Dianga and in this capacity he had accompanied the Portuguese *chatins* on their slave raiding expeditions in Bengal. Before he became a VOC employee he had been a private merchant plying the waters between Bengal and Tenasserim. Cocqu was therefore well equipped to conduct the VOC's slave raiding operations on the Arakanese coast. It is not hard to imagine that the instructions he received on how to conduct these raids were primarily drafted by Cocqu himself and perhaps Arent van der Helm.

The instructions reveal that Cocqu was to launch small *prahus* with native crews from his larger ships. The men in the *prahus* would row to the coast go on shore and acting as bait they would tempt Arakanese vessels to follow them to open sea. The idea was to have the larger ships lie in wait just behind the horizon, so as not to alert the Arakanese crews. As soon as the Arakanese ships came into view the Dutch *yachts* would sail and try to capture the Arakanese crews. This way they used the established practice in the Bay of Bengal that shipwrecked sailors would be liable to enslavement by their saviours to their advantage. Cocqu was ordered to start his campaign on Cheduba, sail to the river of Talak and slowly work his way up to the river of Augruckim, sailing up this river and any other river he encountered in the process, finishing with the Mayu and the islands under governorship of Martim d'Alfonso.[108] On the rivers the same tactics would be used as in the coastal areas. These tactics perhaps present an indication of the way slave raids were conducted in Bengal as well. This way the Portuguese could use their naval superiority to their advantage and with relative small numbers would be able to enslave large numbers of Bengalis.

Schouten described a different method of capturing slaves in the Ganges delta. On two trips to the VOC factory in Hugli in 1663 and 1664 Schouten observed Luso-Arakanese *jelias* patrolling the Hugli river in small groups of seven to eight boats. These *jelias* would operate on the Hugli as far up as Calcutta.[109] They used the lower reaches of the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta, the Sunderbans, to move unopposed between the Sandwip and Pipli. On the Hugli the crews of the *jelias* would prey on small groups of local boats, attacking the crews by night when they went ashore to cook their food. Likewise they would attack villages at night and take the inhabitants away as slaves. This kind of slave raiding provides a typical example of

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dated Batavia 23 August 1650. Vide infra Chapter 6.

[108] Today Saint Martin's islands.

[109] The *thanadar* of Mukhwah near Calcutta famously stretched an iron chain across the river to try and keep Arakanese vessels at bay. BL OIOC Mss. 478 Salimullah, *Tarikh-i Bangala* translated by F. Gladwin as, *A narrative of the transactions in Bengal during the Soobahdaries of Azeem Us Shan, Jaffer Khan, Shuja Khan, Sirafraz Khan and Alivardi Khan translayed from the original Persian* (Calcutta, 1788), p. 84. R.C. Temple ed., *The diaries of Streynsham Master 1675-1680 and other contemporary papers relating thereto* 2 vols. (London, 1911), pp. 2:15, 66.

the slave raiding as conducted by the Portuguese, largely outside Arakanese royal control, but legitimized by commissions from the Arakanese king. As argued earlier this kind of slave raiding was stimulated by the insatiable demand of European companies, like the VOC, for slave labour in their cosmopolitan centres and on the Spice Islands.[110]

Slaves captured during military campaigns would be distributed amongst the military commanders of the Arakanese army. The lowest ranking commanders were probably the *bo rwas,* or village headmen acting as military commanders of a small unit of men raised from a village during times of war. They would receive anywhere between 10 and 20 slaves whereas larger amounts of slaves were given to higher ranking officials, who could see themselves rewarded with as much as 400 to 500 slaves after a successful campaign.[111] Slaves from Bengal had to be declared and registered at tollhouses at the Mayu river and in *Perovijn* .[112]

The conditions under which the slaves were kept are illustrated by a report from the early seventeenth century by Jan van der Burgh. Van der Burgh described a particularly devastating epidemic in his report, the details of which are still interesting. In 1625 Bengal was hit by famine and epidemic disease. The slaves brought by Sirisudhammaraja to Arakan died in large numbers. Out of 10,000 persons brought to Arakan 4,000 died within a few months. The higher ranking military commanders, who had received between 400 and 500 slaves as payment from the king, were left with between 50 to 100 slaves each.[113] The smaller traders who had bought 20 to 24 slaves lost practically everything. The VOC merchants tried to keep their slaves alive by separating the sick from the healthy, cleaning the slave quarters twice a day, bathing the slaves everyday and providing them with clean clothes every two days. Slaves were given fresh food, such as chicken, pork, fresh and dried fish, and vegetables. The measures seemed to have no effect as a large number of slaves died from what they thought to be smallpox. The disease manifested itself with large tumours that appeared in the mouth, breast or side. Every single slave that developed such tumours died. [114] The reports of Portuguese missionaries from Bengal for 1625 confirm the outbreak of a great pestilence in

[110] Schouten, *Oost-Indische Voyagie* vol. 3 7-16;58.
[111] NA VOC 1087, fol. 170-172v. Letter from Jan van der Burcht to Coromandel, dated Arakan 5 december 1625 and Diary of Van der Helm 1644, entry for 17 September.
[112] NA VOC 1059, fol. 369-383 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 22 February 1645.
[113] The distribution of slaves from the spoils of war to pay the army was also described by the first British commissioner in Arakan T.C. Robertson in a letter to George Swinton, dated 18 February 1824: 'It is a custom common to the Mugs, … to give bounty to every man going into actual service. In their own country this practice is I suspect found advantageous to several parties. It enables the sovereign to raise any army without cost and the peaceful subject to purchase an exemption from service, ensures to the individual employed some remunerations for his exertion'. *Precis of the old records of historical interest in the Office of the Commissioner of Arakan* (Rangoon, 1922), pp. 5.
[114] NA VOC 1087, fol. 170-172v. Letter from Jan van der Burcht o Coromandel, dated Arakan 5 december 1625.

Bengal. According to these reports a plague of locusts had destroyed harvests and caused massive starvation, which in its turn had lead to the spread of diseases.[115]

The nature of bondage in Arakan

In Arakan different forms of slavery or bondage were in existence throughout our period. M. Aung Thwin has described the nature of slavery in Burma.[116] Jacques Leider has suggested that the analyses of Aung Thwin would also be valid for Arakan.[117] The main question when studying the institution of Kywanship - or bondage - is to whom was the *kywan* bonded and for what purpose. In theory everyone in Arakan was a subject or *kywan* of the king, but in practice there was a wide variety of forms of bondage. *Kywan* could be bonded to the king, to a monastic institution, or to individuals.[118] Leider has suggested that we should reserve the term slave for those who find themselves *kywan* involuntary.

Michael Charney's analyses of the role of the Augustinian monks in Arakan suggests that the distribution of the king's slaves, *man-kywan*, to representatives of the Portuguese clergy such as Manrique were part and parcel of a more general policy of the Arakanese kings to create patronage ties with their subjects.[119] Charney's thesis is supported by evidence from VOC sources. Although not connected to any religious foundation in the early 1640s the VOC's chief in Arakan, Arent van den Helm, received *man-kywan* from the king as well. Arent van den Helm was for example allotted 25 royal slaves for his own use. I would interpret these gifts as a similar attempt to create patronage ties between the VOC's chief and the king. It is interesting to note that such slaves could be taken back by the king at any moment.[120]

The stories of two groups of Dutchmen who had involuntarily become *man-kywan* provide rare insights into the world of slavery in Arakan from the perspective of the enslaved. The stories of these men have been recorded by the VOC chief in Arakan Arent van den Helm in 1645.[121] The first group consisted of the crew of a yacht owned by a Dutch *vrijburgher* from Melaka. In 1643 the ship was captured in Arakanese waters and the crew was condemned as slaves and distributed across the land. Two sailors named Albert Gerritsz. Geus van Amstel, and Thijs Coster van Antwerpen, survived and told their stories to Van den

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[115] H. Josson, *La mission du Bengale Occidental ou Archidiocèse de Calcutta* (Bruges, 1921), p. 1:72.
[116] M. Aung Thwin, '*Athi, Kyun.Taw, Hpayà-Kyun*: Varieties of commendation and dependence in pre-colonial Burma', A. Reid ed. *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), pp. 64-89.
[117] Leider, *Le royaume d'Arakan*, pp. 436-439.
[118] Aung Thwin, '*Athi, Kyun.Taw, Hpayà-Kyun'*, pp. 67-68.
[119] Charney, *Jambudipa* , pp. 133-143.
[120] The *Daghregister* at Batavia for 24-4-1642 referring to an event early in 1641.
[121] NA VOC 1155 Diary of Arent van den Helm 25 February to 29 October 1645 [Daghregister 't sedert 25 februari tot 29 october 1645], fol. 759-797.

Helm. They described how after their capture they were taken to the palace in Mrauk U where their names and their belongings were registered in a *parabaik*. The registration of slaves was important as a means to keep track of the population the king controlled, or even more important; to keep tract of how many slaves the nobility or the king's vassals had under their command.[122] After having spent almost two weeks in the palace prison they were distributed in small groups to different areas. Van Amstel and Coster were sent to a village in the Lemro valley where they had to work for a group of four families. They worked everyday for a different family and would receive their food from the family they worked for. The labour they were used to perform ranged from pounding paddy, to cutting bamboo, ploughing the land, and other jobs at hand. The families they worked for were described as very poor, the richest person in the village not owning more than one Tanka. The villagers were so poor that it seemed they were often unable to feed their slaves properly. Coster described the business of the village as consisting mainly of cutting bamboo and planting tobacco. Rice was only produced in quantities enough to feed the villagers themselves. The way the villagers treated the slaves is interesting. Coster recounted how they told him that as he was the king's slave and not one of their children they did not feel the need to care properly for him. As a result slaves sent to do heavy agricultural work often died quickly. Van den Helm remarked that the Portuguese and Dutch who where sent as slaves into the woods, by which phrase he meant outside of Mrauk U, disappeared like morning fog on a field.

The other example of the experience as a slave in Arakan is from Adriaan Corneliszoon van Moock Hooploper, a sailor from the VOC ship Eendracht. Adriaan spent more then two years working for the Tripura tribe, learning Arakanese and Tripura during his time in captivity. In the source describing his captivity a certain element of dialogue is preserved, with the author, Arent van den Helm, apparently striving to present part of the story in Adriaan's own words. The story of Adriaan's captivity is not only remarkable but also extremely valuable because it happens to be a unique ego-document of a seventeenth century slave in Tripura. The story begins somewhere during the dry season of 1644, when the Eendracht is waiting to take her cargo of rice and slaves destined for Batavia and Banda:

> We interrogated Adriaan Cornelisz. van Moock Hooploper to find out why he had left his post at the ship Eendracht and how he had become a captive in the hands of the

[122] Cf. NA VOC 1143, fol. 619-620. Translation of a *firman* issued to Luijnenburgh, 1642. '*Jaer den alderhoochsten ende machtichsten Coninck den rycken ende gewesten van Orienten Narabisdigry, Myda Mosa, Coninck van Arracan heer vant gouden hoff, vanden rooden en witten olyphant den onverwinnesten ende den rechten van dit conincryck, Ick mandere alsoo den Capiteyn van den Hollanders soeckt om Nieuwe Bengaelsche slaeven te moogen coopen de heer Sachma, de heren gouverneurs Sicques die te mynder rechter en 's lincker handt syt, Coutewael, Rosy en alle andere mindere regerende persoonen dat soo wanneer den capiteyn den prys van de slaven (die hem toegebracht) gemaeckt heeft, dat de selve slaeff dan by beyde de Sicques gebracht end ondervraeght moet worden en de namen der selver als mede den naem wiese vercoopt moet opgeschreven worden ende wie dat een ambacht kan laedt hem die niet coopen alsoo dat niet begeer*.'

Mooghen [Arakanese]. Van Moock told us that he had been herding some goats for captain Mossel, at the time of his disappearance. He related how he had been accused by bringing food to a runaway shipmate while this boy was hiding in a Pagoda near the river for a few days. 'This boy told the skipper that he had slept at night in the Pagoda's, and that I had brought him food during the day. The skipper sent him away in irons and he threatened to punish me with the whip the following morning just as severe as he would the runaway sailor. As the boy was lying about the whole affair (I had never given him a mouth full of food) and I was afraid of the punishment waiting for me the next day, early next morning I was walking in those same fields near the river where I was used to herd the ships goats. Here I met a black Portuguese man whom I had encountered earlier on board the ship where this man had come to sell fowl. I explained to him my problem and he told me I had no reason to be afraid. He suggested that I should go with him to his village and that he would ask the captain on my behalf for forgiveness in one or two days. I accepted his offer and believed that everything would turn out fine. That day we walked through the hills and at night we arrived in a village that he said was his. He treated me very well and made sure I had enough to eat and drink. The next day I asked him to bring me back on board the ship, but he answered that it would be wiser to wait two or three days for the skipper to forget about the whole affair. After I had stayed for five days in the village the black Portuguese told me that we would leave for the skipper, something I was eager to hear and I was ready to go immediately. That day we started out for the ship, accompanied by five big black chaps. After we had been walking for a while, the five black men tied my arms behind my back, as if I were a thief[123]. The same evening we arrived in a big house that rests on golden poles. Here I was examined by a *Moogh* who asked my name and wrote it down. I was now untied and my legs were put in irons (as all the slaves here walk around in irons) and he gave me over to his people. After I had been in irons in this place for twenty days they took me outside during the night and I was brought into the forest, where I have been since then'.

I asked Adriaan, because I assumed he had been examined in the fort by the *Sicque* [*Sit-ke*], if he had never seen me walking around the place. He said: 'Yes, I saw you there everyday, and when I wanted to call-out to you I was prevented by the guards to do so.' I am sure that he was registered by the white *Sicque* and was condemned to be thrown into the forest, which must have been approved by the King. I asked him further where he had been brought to, to what nation they had sent him, and how he was received by these people.

[123] Probably a group of *ko-ran*. Manrique describes how these were used to fetch slaves. According to Manrique they had a function akin to the English rascal, the catchpoll or the Italian sbirri. Manrique, *Itinerario*, 1:277-278.

> He told me that the country where they brought him is called *Tiparaes Para Kituer*[124], and that it is three nights and two days rowing from here. He related how his new masters tried to find someone who would be able to communicate with him, and so he was taken to various places in search of other Dutchmen. 'Finally, after having visited many white and black Portuguese who could not understand me that well and who told the black man that I did not belong to their people, I was brought to two sick Dutchmen. These two Dutchmen belonged to the captured yacht[125]. One was the merchant Nicolaas van der Graaf, the other one I did not know. They translated my words to the Portuguese that were with them and so my master knew that I was a Dutchman. The next day Van der Graaf died. They cut off his nose and both ears to prove in Arakan that he died. His body was put in a small bamboo hut, where it was torn to pieces by dogs and eventually all the meat disappeared from his bones. Not many days later the other Dutchman died from red diarrhoea. For the same reason his nose and ears were cut off as well. He was put to rest in a similar bamboo shed. A few days after their deaths I was brought back to the place were I had been earlier. Here I was allowed to walk without ball and chain. But they treated me very badly and I was often hit. I was allowed a very meagre meal. The best things I got to eat were half rotten and stinking elephants or buffaloes hides, snakes, sneals and toads. Because I could not stand this food I decided to walk to a different place, named Tianen Para, which lies even deeper into this country. I hoped to improve my position in this way, but I was sorely disappointed. And things turned out contrary.

As Adriaan fled to the Hills, further into the jungle, he was picked up by a people, he named *Abasij*.[126] Eventually however the *Abasij* sold Adriaan back to his former owner, who was not at all pleased at having to buy him back. Here Adriaan had to resume his former duties of carrying water, cutting bamboo and pounding paddy.

As was mentioned earlier, one objective of Arakanese slave raiding was to relocate a part of the profitable weaving industry from south-eastern Bengal to the Arakanese heartlands. Bengali slaves from weaving villages were not scattered across the land or divided over Arakanese or Tripura villages like our Dutch examples. It seems that in Arakan these craftsmen and women lived together in Bengali villages. This idea is supported by the fact

[124] Para meaning Hill in Bengali.
[125] In December 1643 a private Dutch yacht from Melaka was captured by the Arakanese fleet in the river *Samocktoly.* Van der Graaf was the owner of the yacht and he was heading for Chittagong. The capture of the yacht was one of the reasons for the Arakanese-Dutch conflict described in Chapter 6.
[126] For an example of the bamboo burial huts cited by Adriaan see Claus-Dieter Brauns and Lorenz G. Löffler, *Mru. Hill people on the border of Bangladesh* (Basel: Birkhäuser Verlag, 1986), pp. 190-199.

that VOC sources refer to village headmen as either *talukdar*[127] or *rwa ca*. In one instance for example the VOC's factory was searched for illegal slaves on orders of the king's treasurer[128]. Van den Helm describes how on 26 October 1645 about four to five hundred Bengali and Arakanese village headmen stormed into the factory to search for slaves that ought not to be exported. They found one Bengali girl, from a village of *man kywan*, who was sold to the company illegally by her father with the knowledge of the village's *talukdar*. Van den Helm had paid 14 Tanka for her, of which three Tanka went to the *talukdar*, and two Tanka to the writer of the village who had to falsify the records and register one of the king's slaves as deceased. [129]

The stories of the groups of Dutch slaves, and the example of the Bengali *man-kywan* provide evidence for the way in which slaves were treated, how they were divided over the land, and what kind of labour they had to do. The central role of the king is a striking element in both stories. Slaves were brought to the palace in Mrauk U were a court official, in this case the *lakya-mran*, had their details recorded and decided where they were brought to. Van den Helm noted that these decisions had to be signed by the king. It further seems from the mass of documentation provided by the VOC that control over people was extremely important for the Arakanese king. Meticulous records were kept of how many slaves entered the country and where they were kept. The slaves bought by the VOC were regularly inspected to confirm the company did not export slaves belonging to the king; those who were skilled or had lived in Arakan longer than a year. The mechanisms of the slave trade of course varied over time. During the reign of king Candasudhammaraja (1652-1684) the slave trade became more regulated and subject to tougher controls.

In the introduction to this paragraph I suggested that the demand for slaves by the VOC eventually led to a fundamental change in the nature of the slave trade in Arakan. Before the early seventeenth century the trade in human beings mainly was a by-product of war or a result of poverty. It was a trade driven by supply. Sanjay Subrahmanyam in his article 'Slaves and Tyrants in Mrauk U' explored some aspects of Dutch trade with Arakan during the seventeenth century.[130] Subrahmanyam suggested that the slave trade in Arakan should be thought of as a seventeenth century phenomenon. In my opinion the need for cheap labour for

[127] From the middle of the seventeenth century the term *talukdar* had become to denote a class of *zamindars* who contracted with the state to realize the revenue of a given territory. S. Nurul Hasan, 'Zamindars under the Mughals'in Alam and Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State* 285-298, 292. See also B.R. Grover, 'Evolution of the Zamindari and Taluqdari system in Bengal (1576-1765 A.D.) in *Bangladesh Itihas Parishad: Third history Congres Proceedings* (Dhaka: Bangladesh Itihas Parishad, 1973), p. 110.

[128] The dignitary is referred to in VOC sources over the span of 80 years variously as Xama, Cachma, and Sangma or Zangma. I have not been able to determine the corresponding Arakanese title.

[129] NA VOC 1155 Diary of Arent van den Helm 25 February to 29 October 1645 [Daghregister 't sedert 25 februari tot 29 october 1645], fol. 759-797.

[130] S. Subrahmanyam, 'Slaves and Tyrants', pp. 201-253.

Batavia and the Spice Islands created a stable and almost insatiable demand for slaves. This demand would fundamentally change the Arakanese slave trade. Dutch demand created a constant and predictable market for slaves in Arakan. This new market stimulated the Portuguese *chatins* operating under the umbrella of the Arakanese king to conduct regular raids on Bengali villages in the Ganges delta. This probably resulted in a different way of slave raiding, smaller in scale but more brutal and unpredictable, aimed at quick profits. It is also clear that slave raiding continued well into the eighteenth century. We lack however any detailed evidence as to the nature of these raids. It is therefore difficult to say if with the disappearance of VOC demand from the Arakanese markets at the end of the seventeenth century the nature of the slave trade changed as well. If a parallel with the Atlantic slave trade is allowed we could observe that in the Americas and the Caribbean the formal abolition of the slave trade did not immediately herald the end of slavery, nor the clandestine trade in slaves. In Arakan the end to slave raiding was probably gradual as well. The available evidence suggests that slave raiding did not disappear after the Dutch left Arakan but perhaps it became more and more sporadic.[131]

8.5 Income from land revenue and trade compared

Now that we have discussed the functioning and development of two important economic activities in Arakan, the rice and slave trade, it is time to assess the relative importance of the control over south-eastern Bengal in terms of land revenue with Arakanese incomes from trade. The question is essentially how important a source of revenue were Arakan's Bengal dominions in comparison to the income from trade.

The Mughal estimates of the Bengal revenues provide a clear illustration of the wealth of south-eastern Bengal.[132] The first revenue settlement of Bengal made by Todar Mal in 1582 shows the areas which we now know to have been the battlefield between the Arakanese and the Mughals yielded an estimated 2.25 million Rupees, or about 30% of the Bengal revenues. This would include *sarkars* under Arakanese control like Hijli, Jessore, Bakla, the Dhaka area, and of course Chittagong. Chittagong alone accounted for 285,607 Rupees, while the Dhaka area was rated at 987,921 Rupees.[133] The second revenue settlement of Bengal is the 1658 assessment made on orders of Shah Shuja.[134] If we are to follow Eaton, who calculated on average a 100% increase in the revenues of south-eastern Bengal from 1582 to

[131] Roberts, 'An account of Arakan', pp. 130, 133-136, 142-143.
[132] The Mughals clearly used existing accounts and made no settlement of their own. W. H. Moreland, 'Akbar's land revenue arrangements in Bengal', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1926), pp. 43-56.
[133] W. K. Firminger ed., *The 5th report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons in the affairs of the East India Company: dated 28th July, 1812* 3 vols.(Calcutta: R. Cambray, 1917-1918), pp. 2:176-188.
[134] F.D. Ascoli, *Early Revenue History of Bengal and the fifth report, 1812* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), pp. 22-25.

1658/9, the south-eastern Bengal revenues would have grown to c. 5 million Rupees and 50% of Bengal's total revenue, in the middle of the seventeenth century.[135] Although the underlying figures are sometimes difficult to interpret it is clear that south-eastern Bengal was an important economic centre already in the late sixteenth century, certainly worth the effort of conquering. It seems also clear that Shah Shuja's 1658 settlement was a result of his successful campaign in south-eastern Bengal in 1656 described earlier. In the 1658 settlement several new *sarkars* are added to Todar Mal's list, most of them are most likely recently conquered areas. It is therefore wrong to assume, as Eaton does, that the increase in Bengal revenues should be attributed primarily to economic growth. Mughal revenues saw spectacular increases in the mid-seventeenth century that were at least partly the immediate result of conquest. In fact these newly conquered territories had already from the sixteenth century been part of the economic heart of Bengal.[136]

It would be wrong to assume that the majority of these revenues had all flowed into Arakanese coffers during the first half of the seventeenth century. But it is also wrong to assume that because areas such as Chittagong were included in Mughal revenue accounts since 1582, these areas were actually controlled by the Mughals. On the basis of the reconstruction of the Arakanese-Mughal conflict in the preceding Chapters we can however conclude that a large part of south-eastern Bengal revenues flowed into Arakanese coffers before the middle of the seventeenth century. This corroborates Van der Helm's mid-seventeenth century statements quoted earlier where he argued that the income from Bengal taxes was the most important source of revenue for the Arakanese treasury. Earlier in the seventeenth century the Dutch chief on the Coromandel coast wrote to the VOC's governor-general in Batavia that Bengal was of considerable economic importance to the Arakanese.[137]

British and Mughal revenue settlements of the Chittagong area clearly point to the fact that regular land revenue collection was an important element of Arakanese control over this part of Bengal.[138] The fact that when the British took control over Chittagong the land revenue administration was still based on Arakanese standards provides evidence that revenue extraction from Bengal was organized along the same lines as it was in Arakan itself. In Chittagong land was for instance measured in *Maghi kani*.

Land surveys were made according to Arakanese methods, no maps were used, but the measurements were recorded in a field book. This document was written up in the field by the

[135] Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, p. 199; Firminger, *The 5th report*, pp. 176-188; A. Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and his times* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Pakistan, 1963), pp. 74-81.
[136] Eaton, *The rise of Islam*, pp. 198-203.
[137] NA VOC 1057, fol. 127-140 Letter from Wemmer van Berchem to Pieter Both in Batavia, dated Masulipatnam 16 August 1614, fol. 129v-130.
[138] C.H.G. Allen, *Final report of the survey and settlement of the district of Chittagong, 1888 to 1898* (Calcutta, 1900). *Correspondence on the settlement of the Noabad lands in the district of Chittagong* (Calcutta, 1889).

surveyor in a field book which contained the position and dimensions of each plot. The method of the survey was as follows: The surveyor commenced from a starting point, which was usually some recognizable landmark, i.e. a tank or a house. After recording the dimensions of his starting point, a description of the land, the estate to which it belonged and the name of the tenant were recorded. The surveyor then proceeded to measure another plot adjacent to the starting point describing it as to the north, or south etc.[139] The next plot would be one adjacent to the second. All measurements were made with a *nal* or bamboo pole, 12 feet in length. Length and breadth were recorded in *nals*, the product stated in *kahuns*, each *kahun* equalled 16 square *nals*. 7.5 *kahuns* equalled 1 *Maghi kani* or 0.4 acres.[140]

The Mughals moreover used the Arakanese era in fiscal matters.[141] This would lead to the conclusion that the Mughals probably ratified existing estates, which had already been measured by the Arakanese. This is confirmed by the fact that the majority of local *zamindars* reportedly settled in Chittagong from the middle of the sixteenth century when the area was first occupied by the Arakanese.[142] From this evidence we may conclude that regular land rent collection formed part and parcel of Arakanese administration in south-eastern Bengal. As quoted earlier, Talish in the *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah* stated that regular accounts of the Bengal revenue with regards to the *sarkars* to the northwest of Chittagong were kept by the Portuguese operating under Arakanese control from Chittagong.[143]

The question that we should ask ourselves now is what share of official income depended on agrarian management and what share was derived from trade. Taxes on trade in Arakan should be estimated at most at 10%. Of this tax 4% went to the king's officials and 6% directly to the king.[144] Cloth taxed was marked with the king's seal. Without the seal the cloth could not be sold on Arakanese markets. In 1665 the VOC negotiated an import tax of only 1%, in return for which they paid the king's treasurer a sum of 220 Rupees annually.[145]

Between 1636 and 1644 VOC return cargoes from Arakan were valued at between

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[139] The *cac kham khyak* [land revenue inquest] for Dhanyawati of 1803 proceeds along the same lines. Leider, 'Taxation', pp. 74-76.
[140] Allen, *Final report*, pp. 51-56. The *Maghi kani* probably corresponds to an Arakanese measure of land known as *rhan*. Leider, 'Taxation', pp. 77 and fn. 106.
[141] BL Mss. Add. 29086-29088 Ameen Accounts: a return made in the year 1778 by, a commission for collecting materials or settling the revenue of Bengal, compiled from Native Records, and brought down to A.H. 1183 (1769) 3vols., Mss Add. 29088 fol. 57. *Bengal District Records. Chittagong vol. 1 1760-1773 (Letters received and issued)* ed. W.K. Firminger (Calcutta, 1923).
[142] A.M. Serajuddin, *The revenue administration of the East India Company in Chittagong 1761-1785* (Chittagong, 1971), pp. 189-205.
[143] Talish, *Fatiyyah-i-ibriyyah* , fol. 152a-152b. See also J. N. Sarkar, 'The Feringi pirates of Chatgaon, 1665 AD', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 3.6 (1907), p. 425.
[144] NA VOC 1252 fol. 401-416 Letter of Daniel Six to Batavia, dated Arakan 30 January 1665, fol. 408. Cf Leider, 'Taxation', p. 77.
[145] Ibidem.

12,000 and 31,000 guilders a year.[146] This suggests that tax incomes from trade with the Dutch probably amounted to between 800 and 2,500 Tanka per annum. The Dutch certainly were the largest foreign traders in Arakan accounting for the majority of ships entering and leaving the country. If we speculate, we could assume that tax on trade levied on all other traders would probably not amount to much more than taxes levied on VOC trade. This would give a tentative figure for income from trade of c. 5,000 Tanka each year.

Traders of course also brought gifts, which can also be considered as royal revenues from trade. Chinanna Chetti for instance provided in 1640 an exceptionally large present of 6,000 Tanka to the king. Chinanna Chetti was the most important of the Coromandel merchants trading to Arakan. The value of this present was so out of the ordinary that it caused suspicion at the Arakanese court. A different trading mission arriving from Coromandel at roughly the same time for instance brought presents worth 2,000 Tanka.[147] Dutch gifts were more in line with the last figure and were often in kind. Taken together taxes and gifts would probably not amount to more than 10,000 Tanka on a yearly basis.

Tax incomes from trade in Chittagong are difficult to assess. For the early seventeenth century we know that in 1616 the Arakanese king Man Khamaung told the Dutch that during the early years of the seventeenth century Manuel de Mattos had succeeded in generating tax revenue at Dianga of 20,000 Tanka.[148] VOC reports quoted earlier in this Chapter however are adamant in saying that the incessant warfare in south-eastern Bengal drove traders away from Chittagong during the latter part of the seventeenth century. This suggests trade revenues from Chittagong would at least not have grown spectacularly during the rest of the seventeenth century.

If we are now to compare royal incomes from trade with those from land revenues this means income from trade paled into insignificance, even if only Chittagonian land revenue, estimated at between 250.000 and 500.000 Rupees is considered, which as was argued earlier certainly does no justice to the extent of Arakanese control over Bengal. If we add income from the slave trade as another form of revenues the importance of Bengal for Arakan can hardly by underestimated.

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[146] *Dagh-register* vol. 1636, entry for 14 March 1636, pp. 35-25; vol. 1637 entries for 13 February 1637, pp. 41-45, 8 March 1637, pp. 71-73; vol. 1640-1641, entries for 24 January 1641, pp. 167-170, 16 March 1641, p. 211; vol. 1641-1642 entries for 24 April 1642, pp. 140-141, 1 May 1642, p. 145; vol. 1643-1644, entry for 19 March 1644, p. 41.

[147] NA VOC 1134, fol. 183-189 Letter from Arent van der Helm to Batavia, dated Arakan 20 December 1640.

[148] NA VOC 1061, fol. 192r. Letter from Cortenhoeff at Masulipatnam to the chamber Amsterdam, dated 25 April 1616.

Conclusion

The establishment of Arakanese control over Chittagong from the late sixteenth century onwards provided the Arakanese kings with a significant source of revenue which enabled them to expand Arakanese royal power across the Arakan-Bengal continuum. Arakan thrived because the Arakanese kings were able to exploit the riches of Bengal from the strategic fortress at Chittagong. These riches consisted of its land revenue, taxes from trade and human resources. The withering of Arakanese control in south-eastern Bengal after 1638 meant that the income from land revenues decreased. Trade had also slowly moved from south-eastern Bengal to the Hugli in western Bengal because of the incessant warfare between the Arakanese and the Mughals. Although in 1645 the volume of VOC trade with Arakan was still believed to be about 500,000 *guilders* (416,000 *tanka*) as compared to 200,000 *guilders* (166,000 *tanka*) for West Bengal.[149]

In this Chapter we have seen how the Arakanese economy declined from the mid 1640s, and collapsed after the loss of Chittagong in 1666. The large scale trade in slaves slowly died out during this period. VOC demand for Arakanese rice almost disappeared when the Dutch found other more easily accessible sources. The departure of the VOC from Arakan had its impact on other merchants; larger merchants from Coromandel followed the Dutch example and stopped their businesses in Arakan. With the disappearance of the Bengal revenues and the departure of the VOC the Arakanese markets dried up. Arakanese royal power that had depended upon the redistribution of the considerable wealth generated by the control over Bengal and taxes from trade was now challenged from within. The country subsequently was torn apart by civil war.

[149] Zeeuws Archief, Archief van de Staten van Zeeland 2116 I 'Brieven van Gedeputeerden van Zeeland in de Staten-Generaal, met bijlagen (1645)'. Report by Willem Usselincx, The Hague 13 April 1645.